Midsummer Magic

A GARLAND OF STORIES, CHARMS AND RECIPES

compiled by ELLIN GREENE | illustrated by BARBARA COONEY

$6.95

Midsummer Magic

A Garland of Stories, Charms
and Recipes

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illustrated by BARBARA COONEY

One Midsummer Eve, as the moon was beginning to fade, Count Alaric came upon his bride dancing with a band of strange beings in the same meadow where he had first met her the year before. It was at Midsummer, too, that Wee Meg Barnileg, the most cantankerous girl in all Ireland, found herself the captive of wee men as high as your hand. And Cledog, a Welsh woodman, captured a fabled water-horse one Midsummer Eve, to his deep regret years later.

Enchanting stories like these blend gracefully with love charms, bits of lore on Midsummer customs, and recipes for tempting dishes like Fruit Soup and Midsummer Cake in a charming compendium by the compiler of *Clever Cooks.*

The illustrations by Barbara Cooney capture superbly the romance and magic of the ancient solstice festival that is still celebrated today in parts of Europe as well as parts of the United States.

0811

To Carole Marks

with all best wishes.

Ellin Greene

Midsummer Magic

A GARLAND OF STORIES, CHARMS AND RECIPES

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Midsummer Magic

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CHARMS AND RECIPES

compiled by ELLIN GREENE
illustrated by BARBARA COONEY

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for my Midsummer Love

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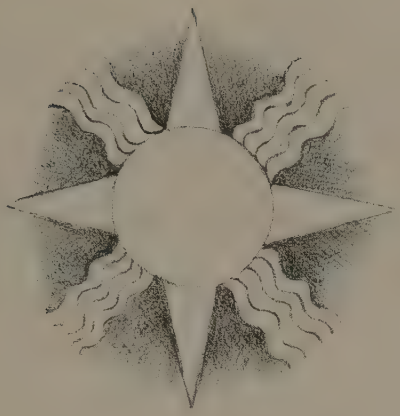


Foreword

Midsummer is a time of merriment and joy, and Midsummer Eve a night of magic and enchantment.

For centuries it was one of the most important folk festivals in Europe, and it is still celebrated in many areas today. Originally, it may have been a ceremony in honor of the sun, for it is held near the date of the summer solstice when the sun travels highest in the sky. The moving disc of the sun seems to have been an object of worship, either as the Creator or as a symbol of the Creator. Though early man had no scientific knowledge about the sun, he intuited that the sun's light and warmth were needed to sustain life. The journey

of the sun during the year symbolized the struggle between the powers of light and life and the powers of darkness and death.

When the pre-Christians accepted Christianity, they were reluctant to give up their festivals, so the Christian Church adopted the pagan rites and gave them new meaning. Midsummer became associated with June 24, the birthday of John the Baptist, whom Christ called "a burning light." The bonfires were called St. John's fires. Herbs gathered on this day were called St. John's herbs and were believed to have great healing power.

Today, especially in Scandinavia, where winters are long and dark, and in those areas of the United States settled by Scandinavians (Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota), Midsummer is a joyous holiday celebrated with fireworks, dancing, and feasting. Homes are decorated with green boughs, berry blossoms, and meadow flowers as a symbol of bringing in the summer. At midnight huge bonfires blaze on the hillsides and on the lakeshores. Young people go out in boats decorated with garlands of birch leaves, and watch the burning fires, which are reflected in the water.

All magic—good and evil—is exceptionally potent on Midsummer Eve. Fairies, witches, and wandering spirits are about. You must be on your guard and not sleep.

The Girl Who Met the Witch of the Woods

(from Sweden)

Once there was an old charcoal burner who lived on a mountainside with his wife and their little daughter, Maria. The cottage was on the edge of a big, wild forest, and deep in the forest was a kiln, or oven, where the wood was burned for charcoal. In summertime, the charcoal burner was almost always at his kiln, and Maria came once a day to bring him food. But on Saturday evenings, he came home and stayed there on Sunday.

One Saturday evening around midsummer, in the most perfect weather, the charcoal burner and his wife were

sitting on a bench in front of their cottage and looking out over the wide landscape. They did not speak to each other, but were happy and quiet, for rest was good after a week's work. Their daughter sat on the doorstoop beside them. She was playing with the cat, and she too was glad she did not have to walk the long road to the kiln today.

But then her mother said, "Little Maria, Father is home and you do not have to go to the kiln with food, but instead, please go to old Grandma with a jug of sweet milk. Grandma is sick, and who knows whether she has a drop of milk to drink."

Little Maria hung her head and pouted. She had just taken off her shoes and had the cat in her lap, and now she must run off again. But being a good and obedient girl, she let the cat down and put her shoes back on her feet.

Her mother gave her a small jug of milk, and said, "Be careful and don't spill any. The milk is sweet and good, and it will taste good to Grandma. And remember, if you meet any strangers on the way, greet them politely, but go quickly on. Follow the straight road through the forest, and don't take any shortcuts through the bushes. Shortcuts are the long way around, you know, and you can lose your way in the wild forest. When you reach Grandma's cottage, give her a big hug, and ask her if you may stay overnight. Don't forget to say your prayers, and start off early in the morning so that you will be home in time for church."

Then her father and mother nodded to little Maria, and she nodded back, and trotted away with her milk jug, and soon was deep in the forest. She knew the way to Grandma's house very well: it was straight ahead through the forest and then into a meadow behind a small mountain. Grandma's little cottage was there between the birch trees and the mountain ash.

It was the most wonderful weather. Even at seven o'clock in the evening, the sun blazed as if it were midday. The forest was in full midsummer bloom, with birch and alder leaves thick and spreading. Linnea and lingonberry were flowering, and the pine and spruce resin glistened in the sun like wet pearls and smelled delicious.

Maria walked with small, quick steps, and held the milk jug a little to one side so that the milk would not spill. She did not meet a soul, for by now on Saturday evening all the forest work was done and everybody had gone home. As little Maria tripped along on her small feet, she hummed a tune she had learned from her father. This is the way it went:

Don't waste your time at the tavern,
Don't lose your way in the wood.
Only be faithful,
Always be faithful,
And the corn will be ripe and good.

But as she went along humming, she saw a long green shadow that moved and seemed to come up close beside her. It felt unpleasant, and Maria crossed to the other side of the road, but then the green shadow glided over to that side. She quickened her step, but the green shadow walked as fast as she. It came closer and closer, was right behind her back, and now it was just abreast of her. And, look! It was not a shadow at all. It was a tall woman, wearing a little green cap on her head, and a tight-fitting green cape that covered her whole body.

It was the witch of the woods.

Maria didn't know that, of course. The witch nodded to little Maria, and Maria nodded back, but walked quickly on. Then she heard the witch laugh. It sounded like a cold mountain stream when it comes hissing over the pebbles, and little Maria felt cold from head to heels.

"Well," said the witch in a beautiful, ringing voice. "Well! So you are told to give only a polite greeting and then go quickly on." And then she laughed again, so that little Maria felt another mountain stream run down her back.

"How do you know that?" asked Maria, and turned around.

"All mothers say that," answered the witch, and pulled her cape closer to her. "But don't be afraid of me. I know the forest like the palm of my hand, and we are probably

going the same way." And so saying she continued to keep in step alongside Maria.

The girl looked up at her out of the corner of her eye. Now the witch turned her face directly at her and smiled, so Maria could see plainly what she looked like. She was slender, and had a round snow-white face and fluttering red-gold hair. Her eyes were light blue, like the lightest blue spring sky, and her pupils were vertical like a cat's eyes; but her eyebrows and eyelashes were black. Her mouth burned as red as the reddest lingonberry, and her small white teeth were pointed and sharp like the teeth of a wild animal.

"What is your name, little girl?" asked the witch.

"My name is Maria," answered the girl.

"You are all called that, it seems," said the witch.

"It is the most beautiful name there is," Maria answered.

"Do you think so?" asked the witch, looking up at the treetops. "I think I will call you Pyrola."

"What kind of a name is that?" Maria asked.

"Don't you know the little flower that grows in the shadow of the forest, and looks sweet and shy, and bends its head and smells so good of wheat bread with almond? You are just such a little midge, and you look so anxious and have just such beautiful light skin. I will call you Pyrola."

"My name is Maria, all the same," said the little girl.

Little Maria did not feel at all comfortable. At every turnoff to the right or left, she hoped the green lady would take it and leave her alone. But the witch did not seem to have any intention of leaving her.

Now they passed a wild rosebush with a big green grasshopper sitting on it. The witch pinched it between two of her white fingers, and popped it in her mouth. Then she crunched it, until the legs and wings stuck out between her lips.

"Ugh!" said little Maria, and clapped a hand over her eyes.

"Why do you say ugh?" asked the witch, laughing. "I thought it was really good and sour." And she smacked her fire-red tongue.

Suddenly little Maria saw something green protruding from under the witch's cape and dragging on the road. "What's that dragging behind you?" she asked. "It rustles over the stones like a snake."

It was the tip of the witch's green tail, which had slipped out from under her cape. Quickly the witch drew her tail back toward her and let her cape fall down over it. "It's only my skirt swinging back and forth," she said.

Now they had come to the very densest part of the forest. It was shining with green moss, and here a small path turned deep into the forest, up toward the mountain.

"Where are you going?" asked the witch, standing still.

"I'm going to Grandma's cottage at Utklinka," Maria replied.

"Well, this is the quickest path to take," said the witch. "Just follow me," and she turned into the forest path.

"No, thank you," said little Maria. "I prefer to follow the straight road that I know."

"Oho!" said the witch, and laughed. "You are supposed to keep to the straight road. Shortcuts are the long way around, and you could get lost in the bushes. Isn't that what your mother told you?"

"How do you know that?" asked Maria, stopping.

"Mothers always say that," answered the witch. "But your mother only told you that because you had to walk alone. You don't know the forest, but I do, and you will get there much faster if you come with me."

Maria hesitated. She sounded so sure, the strange lady, and why should she want to hurt a poor little girl? But her mother had told her very plainly to take the straight road and not to turn in on the forest paths. So Maria stood still, kicking her shoe in the dust.

"Look here," said the witch in a commanding voice, "don't be stupid. You couldn't find a better guide than me." And with that, she took Maria by the hand, and almost without knowing how it happened, Maria followed.

How wonderful and easy it was to walk on the soft moss. The branches dipped just over Maria's head, and the eve-

ning sun burned through the dark pines. The witch had let go of her hand, and they walked in single file along the narrow forest path.

Suddenly the witch said, "Where are your eyes, midge? Can't you tell red from green? Look! Don't you see? Millions of wild strawberries!" And just where the witch pointed, Maria saw one shining red strawberry after another. Usually, strawberries did not grow up here in the spruce forest. They were found on the sunny birch slopes, and so far Maria had seen only unripe berries there. But here they were big and red, as if they had sprung up by magic exactly where the witch's white finger pointed. In a minute, Maria had a whole handful, but all the best ones were still to be picked.

"Where shall I put them?" asked Maria, devouring the red berries with her eyes. "I have the milk jug in my other hand."

"Put the strawberries in the jug," said the witch. "It will hold a great many."

"But what about Grandma's milk?" asked Maria.

"Toss it out," said the witch. "That's easily done."

"But then Grandma won't get any milk."

"Poof to a swallow of milk," said the witch, and gave the jug a knock. "You can always get a drop of sweet milk, but you really have to look for berries as good as these. Have you tasted them?" The witch picked a big red berry and

put it in Maria's mouth. Oh, it was so sweet and fresh; Maria had never tasted anything like it before.

"Now toss the milk out," said the witch, and Maria poured it out on the thick moss, and the moss drank it up instantly, like a big sponge.

"Now you have room for the berries," said the witch, "but hurry up."

When Maria had filled the jug to the brim, the witch said, "That's enough. Now you must rest a little. Go to sleep, and I will sit here and watch."

The next minute Maria was asleep. She did not know how long she slept, but she awoke in the middle of something burning red. At first she thought it was a fire, but no, it was the setting sun burning along the leaves and twigs. And in the middle of the flames sat the witch, looking at her fixedly with her cat's eyes.

"Get up," ordered the witch. "We are going home now."

"Of course," said little Maria, and sat up in the grass. But she thought to herself, "Where is home?"

The witch lifted her up and carried her deep into the forest, higher and higher up the mountainside. Maria's head felt so heavy and at the same time empty of all thought. She leaned her head against the witch's shoulder, and as they strode through the forest, the witch sang softly to her.

Her voice was so wonderful—Maria had never heard anything like it before. It sounded like a mountain brook

rippling and gurgling, like branches whispering. It was like the hot scent of the pine forest when the sun is blazing, and still it was as clear and shining as moonlight on snow.

Deep in the forest I shall hide you,
Long, long, until you are lost.
For I weave pine needles,
I scatter witch herbs,
And my tracks are hidden
When I frighten children.
I rock and I swing,
And when I call "Hi!"
Echo calls "Hi!"
But echo is nothing at all.

The spruce forest got thicker and thicker, and the evening light began to fade. Just as the last red was extinguished in the sky, they found themselves in front of a steep gray mountain wall. The witch drew her finger down the wall, and immediately it cracked from top to bottom. The mountain opened, and the witch entered with Maria on her arm.

As soon as they were inside, the mountain closed up again, and at first Maria saw nothing. It was coal-black night there. Then gradually she saw that the cave was faintly lit, but whether from a lamp or from a crack in the mountain, she could not say.

Gently the witch laid Maria on a bed of moss, and then

she disappeared into a deep corner of the cave. "Go to sleep right away," she called to Maria. "We're getting up early tomorrow morning. But don't forget to say your prayers," and then she laughed so that Maria felt a cold shiver run all the way down her spine.

Maria tried to lie perfectly still, but everything around her was so quiet that suddenly a terrible fear seized her. Perhaps the strange lady had disappeared and left her alone deep in the mountain. At last she could stand it no longer, and asked in a quavering voice, "Are you still there? Are you asleep?"

She heard the witch's angry voice answer, "No, I'm not asleep yet, but I want to sleep. So keep quiet, or else I'll bite your legs."

Little Maria pulled her legs up so quickly that she dropped her shoes, and after that she lay very still and tried to sleep. But she felt a strange, heavy weight pressing on her chest. She could hear a mountain stream rattling outside. It sounded as if it were crying, and at last little Maria, too, began to cry. She folded her hands to say her prayers, but she could not remember one word. All she remembered were the last words of the song the witch had sung to her, and she whispered them instead:

When I call "Hi!"
Echo calls "Hi!"
But echo is nothing at all.

But she knew herself that it didn't sound right, and soon she cried herself to sleep.

She woke up in the middle of a strange dream. She thought that she was standing beside her father outside their little cottage on the hill, and that he had just fired his old rifle in honor of Saint John. She sat straight up, but it was no rifleshot; it was the mountain opening as the witch touched it, and Maria saw right out into the forest.

The sun had not risen yet, and everything was enveloped in a cold white light. The grass was heavy with dew, and the air smelled so cool and invigorating, with all the fragrance of the forest. Now that she was really awake, her dream vanished like smoke.

Outside, the witch was standing shining in the morning light. "Come out, midge," she called. "Now I'll show you the forest."

"I have seen the forest before," said Maria, and ran out barefoot. "I've taken the cows to pasture all over."

"So you have walked and walked and looked up at the trees," said the witch, "and you think you have seen the forest? Now you'll see something else. But first, you must wash in the stream, for today the forest will be glowing hot."

So Maria had to take her clothes off, and step over into the brook that came rushing down from the mountain. It made a little waterfall, and then it looped and eddied

through the meadow. It was so icy cold it bit her skin, and she wanted to get out immediately. But the witch took a firm grip on her neck and dipped her deep in the water. When she came up, the witch asked her, "What is your name? Where did you come from? Where were you going?"

"Yes," said little Maria, gasping for air. "My name is Maria, and I came from Father and Mother's cottage and I was going to old Grandma at Utklinka with a jug of milk."

"Oh, I think you need another dip," said the witch, and grabbed her throat the way a cat clutches a bobolink, and threw her backwards into the mountain brook. Maria felt herself choking, and when the witch's strong hand released her, she flew up so suddenly that the water spurted about her.

"Now what do you say?" laughed the witch. "Who are you? Where did you come from? Where were you going?"

"I am your little midge," Maria cried. "I have always been with you and I will stay with you always." And she threw herself at the witch, and flung both arms around her neck. And from that moment, she forgot everything that had happened before, her father and mother and even her own name.

"Now you are mine," cried the witch, "and now I will show you my kingdom."

She took little Maria by the hand, and they began to run

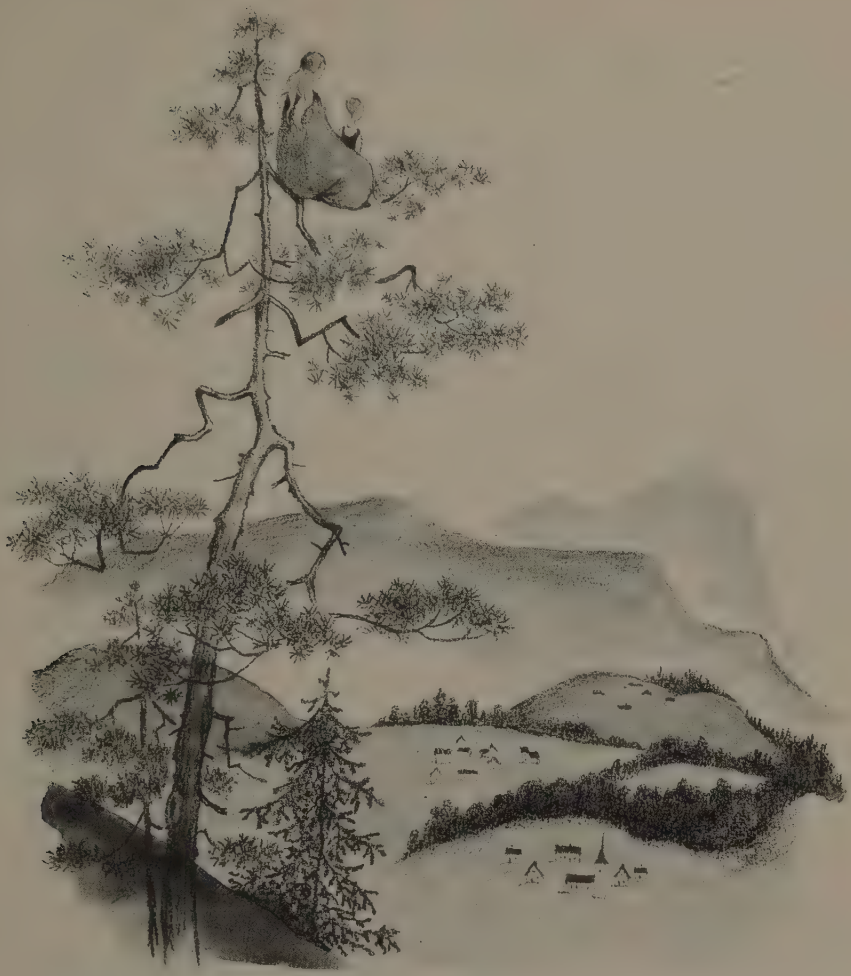
through the forest. But it was not the way people run, for the witch could leap like a hare over stumps and stones, she could float like a dragonfly over marshes, and run up tree trunks like a squirrel. And when they came to the thickest bushes, the witch lay down on her stomach, flat on the ground, and wriggled through like a snake, and Maria could do exactly the same.

At last they reached the mountaintop where the tall dark forest grows. The witch stopped at the tallest pine of all, and pulled a branch down. She sat on it and took Maria in her lap, and then she let the branch go. In the next minute they had swung up to the very top of the pine, and from there they could see for miles and miles, over woods and mountains, and here and there a little lake gleaming like a clear eye.

The wind was strong, and the branch waved so that they swung far out over the mountainside below. Maria felt dizzy, but the witch trala-ed, "Are you scared, little wretch? Why, isn't it wonderful to swing up here in the air, as if we were flying? And wherever you look, as far as you can see the blue forest, it is all my kingdom."

"What are those little white dots between the forests?" asked Maria, looking carefully out from under the witch's arm. They were churches and monasteries, villages and farms spread over the wide countryside.

"Oh, those are only toys that people put together to amuse



themselves with," the witch told her. "They soon go to pieces."

"People?" asked Maria, bewildered. "What are people?"

"Why, they are nothing at all," said the witch, and kissed her.

Just then they heard a peep in the pine where they sat. The witch's green cat-eyes glittered. "Be quiet," she said.

"It's a bird's nest," and easy as a weasel she crept over the branches and bent the twigs aside. Yes, it was a wood pigeon's nest. The young ones had just hatched, and their beaks were wide open waiting for food.

"Ugh, such ugly helpless little creatures," said the witch. "I hate ugly things. Away with them!" And she dashed the nest and the birds down on the rocks below. Then the mother pigeon came flying back, and she flew round and round their heads, complaining over her lost young ones.

Maria felt a sudden pain in her heart. "Poor little birds," she sighed. "Why did you kill them?"

"Don't be so weak-hearted," the witch told her. "I won't have it. Everything has to die sooner or later."

"You, too?" asked Maria, and looked up at the witch. She looked so young and alive.

"Not for a long time," said the witch, and laughed. "Not before all this green earth has disappeared—and who knows when that will be. But as long as I live, I'm going to have fun, and nobody in the whole world knows how to have as much fun as I." And she slid down from the top of the tree with Maria.

"I might as well show you right away the very best I have," said the witch, and turned into a narrow path. Nothing grew there but scrub pine, and underneath moss, full of red and yellow flowers. The sun was blazing hot, and here and there raindrops seemed to hang from the pine

needles. But it was only resin brought out by the sun, and it smelled so spicy and strong. Then they came to a little lake sleeping in the sunshine, perfectly still. But suddenly it woke from its dreams, the earth gave way under it, and it threw itself down in a white, foamy waterfall.

"Look!" said the witch. "This is my sleigh run!" And just then a bunch of logs came gliding across the lake and danced down over the waterfall. It was as if someone had emptied a box of giant matches. Helter-skelter, the logs plunged one over the other, splashed underwater, rose up again, and were carried away downstream.

The witch uttered a shrill cry. It sounded like a hawk hunting for birds high above the clouds. And then, so suddenly that Maria did not know how it all happened, she saw the witch jump onto one of the logs in the water, and tumble down the fall with it. Her red-gold hair shot out behind her like a flame in the sun.

"Hello, hello," she shouted. "Away, you stupid salmon! Here comes the queen of the forest, riding." And the salmon jumped up out of her way like silver spray, and the next moment the witch had disappeared underwater.

"She will drown, she will drown," cried little Maria, and she lay down on the edge of the mountain and looked over. But when the log rose out of the water, the witch swam, light as a weasel, to shore, and soon was back beside Maria on the mountain.

Drops of water glittered in her hair and her green cape sparkled like diamonds. She shook herself, and laughed. "Oh, how fresh it was. It is the most fun of all. And now it's your turn."

"My turn?" said Maria, frightened. She looked down into the bubbling, thundering waterfall. "I'm afraid. I don't dare."

"That's only the first time," said the witch. "After that, you'll think it's more fun than anything. I'll help you. Now, watch!" A big log came dancing by, and just as it glided past, the witch gave Maria a push, and suddenly she was sitting on the log, rushing down the fall. It was terrible. The water whipped around her, the waterfall roared and boomed. She hardly knew if she was alive or dead. She only felt that she was being carried away by something wild and horrible.

She sank underwater with the log, but when it rose again, she saw the green shore in front of her, and in the same instant she reached out her arms and caught some pine branches hanging over the water. She was safe. Then she ran as fast as she could up to the rock, where the witch stood laughing at her.

Maria shivered and cried. "Stop your sniveling," said the witch. "I told you, it only scares you the first time. Look at me!" And in a wink she was out on a log again, rushing downstream with loud cries of jubilation.

Maria looked after her. It was really exciting to see the witch go dancing down the fall, and Maria thought, "Well, it *can't* be dangerous, for I didn't hurt myself the slightest bit. Perhaps I should try it again." And when the witch came back to her, Maria thought, "She will think me clever if I leap all by myself." So she did, and since she was bewitched, everything went well.

She went down the fall again, and this time it was not so terrible. She still shivered a little, for it was still wild as the white water sprayed around her and she tumbled helplessly down, but she had hardly come up before she did it again. And now she, too, thought she had never had more fun.

"I told you so," said the witch, who sat combing her red-gold hair in the sun. "But that's enough for today. Now we go home. We must be home before the last ray of the sun is gone."

"Why?" asked Maria. "The summer nights are so beautiful."

"I can't enter the door to my house after sunset," replied the witch, "and I never stay out at night."

"Are you afraid of something?" asked Maria.

The witch looked at her with shining eyes. "Don't ask, little midge. Hold your tongue and follow me." And she moved with light steps away through the forest.

She never took any paths, for she knew how to get by

trees and bushes, no matter how thick and wild they grew. Maria padded behind without a word. At the mountain the witch moved her finger across the stone, the mountain opened, and they were home again. Maria was tired, and she hardly lay down on her soft moss bed before she was asleep, and she slept without dreaming until morning.

It was strange how fast summer went by. Little Maria did not count the days. She had, in fact, forgotten their names. She only knew that sometimes it was morning and sometimes evening, and that every day was happy. But it wasn't only in sunshine that the forest was beautiful. When it rained—that could be wonderful, too, if only the witch showed the way. She knew the most hidden groves where they could sit deep under the wild rosebushes and listen to the rain whisper outside like music. The wild roses hung by the thousands on the bushes, and white convolvolus twined in and out. It was a whole world of berries and flowers, insects and birds, that people never discover, and here the witch and Maria played together for hours.

If it stormed, the witch took Maria to her swing on the mountain, and Maria was no longer frightened. The more wildly the crown of the pine tree swayed, the more wonderful Maria thought it was. There they sat and looked out over all the forest, twisting and bending in the wind. "I like to watch my green sea tossing," said the witch. "When it is quiet for too long, I get bored." And every sunny day

they went to the waterfall and sailed down the thundering cataract on logs, and truly, that was the most fun of all.

Now Maria could plainly see how eager the witch was to do hurt and harm. She liked to kill birds and small animals, and it amused her to injure the cattle that grazed in the forest, but she was never so glad as when she could hurt people.

At first, Maria did not like that—it made her strangely sick, and her heart ached—but by and by she became accustomed to it. The witch was so beautiful and fascinating, and Maria followed her everywhere like a shadow, and if the witch thought it was nothing very much to make cows sick or frighten peasants or kill birds, certainly an unimportant little girl like Maria should not take it so seriously.

The witch could sing like nobody else in the world. The mystery of the forest and the wild waterfall were in her songs. Sometimes they were so strong and fearful that the spruce tops swayed, and clouds ran away in terror. But sometimes they were strangely moving and sweet, so that the birds did not dare lift a feather, and the little fish stood still in the stream to listen.

When the witch sat on a knoll and sang, with her white face turned toward the sky and her hands clasped around her knees, she was so beautiful that little Maria could only sit staring at her. The witch's eyes, which were usually so wild and menacing, became strangely sad then. Her whole

face expressed so much pain that little Maria had tears in her eyes, and she knew that she loved the witch boundlessly and would rather die than ever leave her.

Was it possible that autumn had come already? The hazel bushes in the sunny grove were full of ripe, brown nuts. And there, hunched up in the heart of the big bushes, sat the witch and Maria. The witch cracked nuts with her sharp white teeth and gave Maria handfuls of ripe kernels to eat. Squirrels poked their small brown faces through the leaves and looked at them with big, surprised eyes, but when they saw it was the witch of the woods herself who sat there, they fled like lightning, with their tails in the air.

The grain was already ripe in the fields, and from the hills they could see people out harvesting. One day the witch said to Maria, "Today they are cutting the rye at the forest's edge. Come, let's go and have some fun with them."

It had been a good harvest year. The grain was tall, with long kernels in the ears. Half the field was already cut when they arrived. The men were scything and the women came behind, binding the grain in sheaves. Since it was warm, the men had thrown off their jackets and were working in their shirtsleeves.

"Look," whispered the witch to Maria as they lay huddled in a bush at the edge of the forest. "Do you see something moving in that bunch of clothes over there? I believe it's a baby lying there."

And so it was. One of the peasant women had brought her baby with her. It was a little, little one, hardly a month old. He lay on his back on the ground, wrapped in his father's jacket. He had stuffed one little thumb in his mouth and sucked on it with all his might, while he stared with wide-open eyes up at the blue sky, as if he were wondering about the riddle of life itself.

"Ugh, what a horrible little creature," said the witch. "Crawl over there and grab him, Maria, and then we will hide him from his mother."

"No," said Maria immediately. "I won't do it." She did not know herself why she had decided not to do it.

"Don't be afraid they'll catch you," said the witch. "I'll yodel to attract their attention. Hurry up now!"

"I won't do it," Maria persisted. "I won't take the poor little one from its mother."

"Take that for your 'poor little one,' " said the witch. Her eyes sparkled, and she whipped her tail across Maria's arm so hard that it turned red.

"Wicked one!" cried Maria. "You can beat me as much as you like, I still won't do it."

"Then I'll have to do it myself," said the witch, and she wriggled like a snake through the grass, lifted the baby, and ran off with it deep into the forest.

Maria ran after her, but she could not catch the witch. It was late evening when she saw her again. She was alone,

tall and proud, wrapped in her green cape with her tail rustling behind her like a snake.

"What have you done with the baby?" Maria asked.

"It is no concern of yours," said the witch. Her voice sounded cold and hissing. "Come with me immediately, or else I'll eat you." And Maria was so frightened that she tripped after her. But that night she could not sleep at all. All through the night she heard them calling in the forest, and she thought she heard the mother crying and moaning over her child.

In the morning, the witch stood by her side and said, "I'm angry with you. You disobeyed me, and as punishment you can't go to the forest today. You must stay here and think over how naughty you've been." And with that the witch left, slamming the mountain shut behind her.

Never before had Maria been alone in the mountain, and she felt as if she were buried alive. At first she looked and looked everywhere for a little crack to crawl out through, but all around she came up against the mountain wall. It was cold and pitch-black, and Maria fell down on the stones and cried.

She was terribly unhappy. What had happened to her? Had she lost something? Had something been broken? She tried to remember something that could make her happy. She thought of the forest when the sun was shining, of the wide view from the mountain, of the waterfall and the wild

games they played there, but everything was just as sad. She thought of the witch's loveliest song, but it only made the pain in her chest all the stronger.

In the evening the witch returned. Maria heard the mountain open. "Good evening," said the witch, laughing wickedly. "Have you had fun today?"

"Have you had fun?" Maria asked.

"No, I've been angrier than I've been in a long time. Can you imagine—they discovered the young one, though I had hid it so well, among the thickest spruce. But he shrieked—the little troll—he shrieked so that his mother found him, and when I came to the hiding place to strangle him, he was gone."

Suddenly Maria felt as if a stone had fallen from her heart. She wanted to thank somebody because the little child had been saved, but she did not know who to thank, so she said to the witch, "Oh, thank you!"

"Are you thanking me for having the baby stolen from me? Have you lost your mind? I shouldn't wonder, sitting so long in the dark. Tomorrow, I will let you come out with me again."

Soon night came, but Maria could not sleep. She lay looking at the rock ceiling above, wondering why she was so unhappy. Then suddenly, she saw something shine through a crack in the cliff. It glittered and glittered. What could it be? Oh, it was a little, little star.

"A star," Maria whispered, and stretched her arms toward it. "I had forgotten all about the stars." The star smiled and winked at her, and seemed to say many comforting words.

"Oh, you dear, blessed stars," Maria said softly to herself. "It must be you the witch is afraid of."

Not until the sun was about to rise did the star withdraw and disappear in the sky. But now Maria remembered that there was something other than what she saw every day. What all that other was, she could not make clear to herself; but now she knew quite strongly that she wanted to be away from the witch's mountain, and she puzzled and puzzled over how she would be able to escape.

She knew that wherever she might hide in the forest, the witch would find her. Therefore she must try to stay out one night, so that the witch would not pounce on her immediately. "Didn't I have anything with me when I came here?" she wondered. And then she remembered that she had had a pair of shoes, which lay somewhere in the cave. Now, when she went in the forest with the witch, she was always barefoot.

She found her shoes and tried to put them on, but they had become so strangely small that she could not. She guessed that her feet had probably swollen from always running barefoot. So she took the shoes and put them in her apron pocket, and that was very wise, for if you leave even

the smallest belonging with a witch, you must return for it, and then you are lost.

Fall had now come in earnest. The water had risen in the waterfall and the rivers, the mountain ash were full of bunches of blood-red berries, and storms tore and ripped the treetops. The migrating birds had gone, and dead leaves danced wildly in the forest.

"People don't understand this," said the witch. "But for me just now it is so fresh and wonderful!" And she sat down in a mountain stream and was swept away, so that her hair shot out like a flame behind her.

One day a violent storm blew up, and in the evening the sky was fire-red. Maria could hardly stand up, but the witch stalked firmly through the dry leaves that whirred around her. As they reached the mountain, the sun was about to go down, and the witch said, "We must hurry. We have been out too late."

But Maria did not hurry at all. Instead she stood a little way from the mountain and looked down at the ground, as if she had lost something.

"Hurry up!" called the witch. The mountain had already opened. "We're lost if we don't get in before the sun sets."

But Maria stood still.

"Go to the Devil," shouted the witch. She gave a frightful howl, like a wolf baying from hunger, and went into the mountain, which shut behind her with a terrific crash.

Hardly had the mountain closed behind the witch when Maria began to run. She ran as if her life depended on it. She fell over dry branches, and she waded through brooks. It was an icy night, and Maria froze and shivered, but her only thought was to be out of the forest before sunrise. Dark clouds chased across the sky, but between them she could see patches of blue-black sky and big, clear stars.

"Oh, the stars." Maria stretched her arms to the sky. "My beloved stars that I had forgotten, help me and light me out of the forest." And when morning came, pale and clear, she was out of the forest on the great highway.

She sat down by the side of a ditch and looked out over the open country. She seemed to recognize it. Hadn't she seen it before? It spread out so big and wide, with farms and churches and monasteries, and a big lake shining like the sea behind. The sun rose higher and higher, and as Maria walked along the highway, she caught sight of her own shadow.

"But is that really my own shadow?" she wondered. "I can't have such a long shadow. It's a grown person's shadow." And she looked around to see if somebody was following her.

Then she saw two old people walking along with a cart. The old man pulled the cart and the woman pushed. They looked so old and bent, and trudged step by step along the dusty road.

Maria went up to them, and asked, "Good people, please tell me if this is my own shadow I see ahead of me here on the highway?"

The old man stopped the cart, and the old woman let go her grip, and they looked at each other in surprise. "What does she mean?" asked the old woman, "asking if her shadow is her own? Whose else could it be?" But the old man made a sign to his wife that perhaps the poor girl had lost her wits.

"Well, you see," said Maria, "I'm just a little girl, only eight years old, but this shadow is so big and long, as if it belonged to a grown person."

"Are you a little girl?" asked the old woman. "I would guess you are eighteen years old, to judge from your height."

"No, no," Maria insisted. "I was eight years old Our Lady's Day, and it was Midsummer Day when I went to Grandma with the milk."

The old man and woman looked at each other. "What might your name be?" asked the woman, looking at Maria.

"My name is Maria," she replied. "And it's the most beautiful name there is, that's what Mother always said."

"And where did you go when you went with the milk to Grandma?" asked the old woman. "You never reached her."

"No, I know," said Maria, and hung her head. "I know

I never reached her. I was—I was—" She looked in anguish at the old woman. "I don't know where I have been," she said, and began to cry. "But look, here are my shoes, the shoes I had with me when I ran from home. My feet must have swollen, for they have become so tight that I can't get them on anymore."

When the old woman saw the small, patched child's shoes, she began to kiss them and cry, and then she fell on Maria's neck. "My poor darling child," she said, and laid Maria's head on her breast. "It is ten years since you left home to carry the milk to Grandma, and where you have been I can well imagine. But now that you are here again, praise God, we will not talk anymore about it."

The old man cried too. "Is it really true? Is she really our own little Maria?"

"Yes, dear Father. I am Father's own little girl," she said, and threw her arms around his neck.

"Then you must also remember the tune I taught you when you were small."

"Of course I do," said Maria. "This is the way it goes":

Don't waste your time at the tavern,
Don't lose your way in the wood.
Only be faithful,
Always be faithful,
And the corn will be ripe and good.

"Dear Lord," said the father, and wiped his old red eyes with the back of his hand. "Our own Maria whom we have mourned as dead and lost!"

And now both father and mother recognized their daughter, and they went together to the little cottage on the hill. Everything was the same as the day Maria left, except that all the hop vines were withered now, and all the flowers in the garden were dead.

"And the cat that I liked so much?" asked Maria. "He was black with a white spot on his forehead, and this cat is white."

"The black cat has been dead for many years," said her father.

"And Grandma?" asked Maria.

The old man and woman looked at each other. "Grandma is also dead," said the woman softly.

"And she never received her milk then?" asked Maria. Her eyes were full of a dreadful question.

"No, she did not get it," said the mother quietly.

"Did she die soon?" asked Maria again.

The parents were silent for a minute, but then her father said, "Yes, she died the day after." And then he took a pinch of snuff and turned away, because he did not want to see Maria's face.

Maria sat down and began to cry as if her heart would break. Neither father nor mother could console her. She

cried until she had no more tears to cry, and then she stopped.

From that day on, Maria hardly ever left her parents' cottage. She helped them with everything, both indoors and out, and the harder the work, the more eager she was to do it. A milder and more obedient daughter nobody could have, and gradually she also became a little gayer.

But all of a sudden she might sit down and cry bitterly. "Oh, oh," she would moan, "Grandma never got her milk."

A girl who bathes her face in the dew as the Midsummer sun rises will be lovely all through the year.

SWEDISH CREME

1 cup sugar
1 package unflavored gelatin
1 pint half-and-half
1 pint sour cream
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 package frozen strawberries

Mix sugar and gelatin together. Add half-and-half. Heat over low heat until gelatin is dissolved. Cool.

Fold in sour cream and vanilla. Chill in refrigerator.

Defrost strawberries. Spoon creme into individual dessert dishes and add strawberries. *Serves 6 to 8.*

If the sun shines while it rains,
the witches are baking cakes.

THE MIDSUMMER TREE
(Majstång)

In Scandinavia midsummer nights are called "white nights." Skies are never entirely dark, for the light of one day does not fade before the light of the next day begins. On Midsummer Eve the sun may still be seen at midnight. Children are allowed to stay up as long as they want. Families gather together in the countryside.

The men cut down a young evergreen tree, a symbol of life, and strip it of its branches. A crossbar is attached partway up the pole and hoops are suspended from either arm of the bar. Sometimes a heart-shaped garland is placed at the center of the bar. The hoops probably once represented the sun and moon rotating round the Tree of Life. From top to bottom the Midsummer Tree is decorated with birch leaves and wild flowers gathered by the women and children. Sometimes ribbons, representing the rays of the sun, are added, and at the top the national flag. Then the pole is raised and everyone dances round it from east to west in the direction of the sun.

There are many ring dances. In one, the girls form the inner ring and the boys form the outer ring. The inner ring moves clockwise, the outer ring moves counter-clockwise, while everyone sings this little rhyme:

The little ring is turning
The girls are in a flurry
Greeting one another.
Then everyone stands still.

When the dancers stop each boy chooses a partner from the inner ring.

Adults and children join in singing folk melodies and playing games. The tugs of war and mock battles symbolize the combat between the forces of darkness and light, winter and summer.

SUN PORRIDGE

In Lapland, Sun Porridge is a porridge of meal, mixed with butter, cooked and eaten on Midsummer Day.

The Golden Bird

(from Denmark)

Once upon a time there lived a king and queen who had three sons. What the older sons were called doesn't make any difference, but the youngest was named Alexander. When the boys were still quite young the queen died and the king fell into a deep and strange sickness. Though he was conscious he could move neither hands nor feet, and not a doctor nor a wise man in the kingdom could help him.

Finally, a wizard came who said he could cure the king. He gave the chief minister a little green twig that might have come from a fruit tree, and told him to plant the twig, and when it was grown it would bring help to the king.

The king's gardener planted the twig, watered it daily, and guarded it well. Three years after it was planted it had grown tall as a tree, and it bore a single blossom that shone like pure gold. But on Midsummer Eve a terrible thing happened. The golden flower disappeared and no one could tell where or how, and the poor king felt worse than ever.

Then the king's gardener enclosed the tree with a high fence so that no animals or people could get near it, and only he had a key to the gate.

When a year had passed, the tree bore another blossom, dazzling as the sun. Everyone prayed that nothing would happen to it, and on Midsummer Eve the king's eldest son sat under the tree to guard it.

The chief minister said, "Mind you watch it well, for it is your father's life you are guarding."

But in the morning the wondrous flower was gone, the prince could tell nothing about it, and the king lay ill as ever.

The next year the tree bloomed again and bore a single golden blossom. The second son said he would guard the precious flower on Midsummer Eve. He sat under the tree all night, but when morning came the flower was gone and he could tell no more about it than his brother.

Then the youngest son said, "Next year I shall guard the golden flower." So when Midsummer Eve came again Alexander went out into the garden to watch. But he did not sit under the tree as his brother had done. Alexander climbed

up among the branches and sat right underneath the beautiful gold flower and did not let it out of his sight for one moment.

At the stroke of midnight he heard the rustling of wings, and a golden bird came flying between the branches and nipped off the flower with its beak. Alexander tried to catch the bird, but it slipped through his fingers, and only a feather from its tail remained in his hand.

The young prince took the feather to his father, and the feather shone so brightly that the king's room was filled with a golden light. Then the wizard was sent for at once, and when he saw the golden feather he said, "The king is ill indeed, but he needs only to hear the song of the golden bird and he will be well again."

"I will go in search of the golden bird whose song will make my father well," said the eldest son. So he was given servants and clothes and money, and he started on his way.

He travelled for many days until he came to a pleasant land where there was always merriment and never sorrow. And here he stopped and here he stayed, and he soon forgot all about the golden bird and his sick father.

When a good time had passed and nothing was heard from the eldest prince, the second son said he would go in search of the golden bird. So he too was given servants and clothes and money, and he started on his way.

After a time, he came to the pleasant land where there

was always merriment and never sorrow, and the first person he met was his brother. So he stayed there, and the two brothers had so much fun feasting and drinking that the second brother also forgot about the golden bird and his sick father.

When a period of time had passed and neither of the two brothers had returned, the youngest son asked to be allowed to go in search of the golden bird. His father feared that he would not return, but Alexander begged so earnestly that at last the king agreed. And Alexander set out with neither gold nor clothes nor servants, but only his horse and a handful of coins.

And when he had travelled a long way he met a large fox, and the fox said to him, "If you are determined to find the golden bird I will show you the way. Only you must promise to listen to what I say and obey me."

So the young prince thanked the fox and promised to do everything he said.

"Climb on my back," said the fox, "for the way is long, and we must travel swiftly." So Alexander climbed on the fox's back and they set off together.

When they had travelled a long way they came to a castle, all gilded with gold so that it shone and sparkled like the sun.

"That castle belongs to a young troll king," said the fox, "and in that castle lives the golden bird. It will not be easy

to take the bird, so listen carefully to what I say. When we reach the castle I will give you a magic hair that will open any lock. Inside the castle you will find the golden bird sitting in a jeweled cage. Take the bird out of the jeweled cage and put it inside the wooden cage that lies beside it, and come straight back to me."

Alexander promised to do just as the fox had said. So when they came to the castle the fox cast a spell and everyone within the castle fell asleep, and Alexander took the magic hair from the fox's tail and entered the castle gates. He found the golden bird easily enough, but when he took it out of the jeweled cage and put it in the wooden cage the bird became as drab as a sparrow. So Alexander put the bird back in the jeweled cage, and started out of the castle.

But the bird woke at once and began to shriek in a loud voice. And everyone in the castle wakened. The guards caught Alexander and threw him into a dungeon.

"If only the fox were here, he would know what to do," thought Alexander.

At that moment the fox appeared before him and scolded Alexander for not obeying him. But Alexander begged the fox to take pity on him, for his father's sake.

"Well, just this once, I'll help you," said the fox. "But you must do exactly as I say. When morning comes the troll king will ask you if you wish to be hanged or burned.

Then you must answer that if he will set you free you will bring him the golden horse in exchange for the golden bird. The troll king will agree to this, for he has long wanted the golden horse, but he has never been able to get it. When you are set free, come straight to me."

Alexander promised to do just as the fox said. When morning came and he was brought to the troll king, Alexander answered, "I want only the golden bird, and in return I will bring you the golden horse." So the troll king set Alexander free, and the young prince hurried back to the fox.

"Climb upon my back and I will show you the way," said the fox. So Alexander jumped on the fox's back and they were off like the wind.

When they had travelled all day they came in sight of the castle which belonged to the second troll king. "Now listen carefully," said the fox, "and do exactly as I say.

"In the stable you will find the golden horse with a bridle and saddle of gold. Beside them lies a plain bridle and common saddle. Exchange these for the ones of gold, then lead the horse out of the stable and come directly to me."

"Thank you," said Alexander. "I will do just as you say."

So when they came to the castle the fox cast a spell and everyone within the castle fell asleep. Then Alexander took the magic hair from the fox's tail and entered the courtyard. But when he found the golden horse he thought that a plain bridle and saddle would never do for such a handsome creature and he left on the bridle and saddle of gold.

No sooner had he led the horse outside the stable than it began to neigh and prance about, and the whole castle awoke. The troll guards caught Alexander and took him to the king.

"Well," roared the troll king, "would you rather be burned or hanged?"

"Neither," said the young prince. "I seek the golden horse, for I need the golden bird."

Then the troll king replied, "I treasure the golden horse, but there is a maiden I treasure more. If you will bring the fair Helene to me, you may keep the golden horse."

"I will bring her to you if I can," answered the prince.

So the troll king let him go, and Alexander ran back to the fox. The fox was angry with Alexander, and at first refused to help him. But Alexander begged, for his father's sake, and at last the fox agreed, under the condition that Alexander would do exactly as the fox said.

They travelled all day till they came to the castle of the third troll king. "There you will find the fair Helene," said the fox, "but it will not be easy to take her. And if you fail this time, I cannot save you, so listen carefully. Helene is kept in the highest tower of the castle. When you find her do not stop to admire her beauty. Take off her crown, cover her face with her hair, and fly down the stairs and back to me."

"Thank you," said Alexander. "I will do just as you say."

So the fox cast a spell over the castle, and Alexander opened the castle gates with the magic hair. He dashed up the stairs till he came to the tower where the fair Helene was imprisoned. The prince was dazzled by her beauty, but remembering the words of the fox, he did not stop to admire her but put his arms around her and took off her crown. When he did this, a terrible thing happened. The maiden's beauty faded, and in his arms lay an ugly old hag.

Alexander was about to let her go when he remembered the fox's warning, so he wrapped the old witch in her long gray hair and ran down the stairs and back to the fox.

"Jump on and hold fast," cried the fox, so Alexander threw the old witch across the fox's back, climbed on the fox, and away they flew like the wind till they were back at the troll king's castle.

And when they had stopped, Alexander looked at the old witch and there was the fair Helene, as young and beautiful as ever. And he fell in love with her and wished to have her for his bride, but he knew he could have only the golden bird.

"Listen carefully," said the fox, "and you shall have the fair Helene and the golden horse and the golden bird. When you enter the castle you must say to the troll king, 'Here is your treasure, now give me mine,' and the horse will be brought at once, for the king will be pleased to have the maiden. When you are mounted on the horse, Helene must run up to you to thank you for saving her life. You must catch her round the waist and swing her up on the horse, and say 'Go up, golden horse, go up.' And the horse will rise like a bird. And when you have flown an hour you must say, 'Go down, golden horse, go down,' and the horse will glide down, and I'll be there to meet you."

And it happened just as the fox said. Then the fox and

the prince and the fair Helene travelled together till they came to the castle of the first troll king.

"Listen carefully," said the fox. "When you see the troll king, you must say, 'I have brought you your treasure, now bring me mine.' But do not dismount from your horse, and when the king gives you the golden bird, say 'Go up, golden horse, go up,' and before the troll king can catch his breath, you'll be up in the sky and out of sight."

Then Alexander followed the good advice of the fox exactly, and the bird sang sweetly, and Alexander flew away with the maiden and the golden bird. When they had flown an hour, Alexander said, 'Go down, golden horse, go down,' and they floated to the ground not far from where the fox was waiting for them.

"Now you have everything you could wish," said the fox. "You have the golden bird whose song will cure your sick father, you have a horse that flies like a bird, and you have the fair Helene to be your bride. Only do not let your brothers take hold of you before you reach home."

Alexander thanked the fox with all his heart. "But how can I ever repay you?" he asked.

"On your wedding day I shall come to you and you can help me by doing everything I ask," said the fox. So Alexander promised and they parted.

Then Alexander and Helene started toward his father's

castle, but when they came to the place where Alexander's brothers were staying he forgot the fox's warning, and he thought he would stop there a little while. His brothers pretended to be pleased at Alexander's good fortune, but secretly they plotted against him.

The brothers put sleeping pills in the wine that Helene and Alexander drank. Then they tied a heavy stone around Alexander's neck and threw him into a marsh. When Helene awoke they pretended that they too had been asleep and did not know what had happened to Alexander. They pretended to search for their brother, and when he was not found they took Helene with them, threatening her life if she said anything about Alexander.

So they arrived at the castle. But Helene refused to speak and only cried, and the golden horse would not eat nor let anyone come near, and the golden bird sat silent and its feathers no longer shone.

In the meantime, the fox had followed at a distance and when he saw what had happened, he pulled Alexander out of the marsh. "Every time I tell you what to do, you do the exact opposite. You are not worth saving!" scolded the fox. But Alexander was so happy to see the fox that they soon made up.

The fox told Alexander to disguise himself as a veterinarian, and when he came to his father's castle, say that he could cure the golden horse, and the rest would follow.

"But, remember, on your wedding day, you must go out east of the castle and there you will find me, and you must do exactly as I ask."

So Alexander disguised himself as a veterinarian, and when he came to his father's castle the guards did not recognize him but let him in because he said he could cure the king's horse.

When Alexander went up to the golden horse it began to neigh and to eat out of his hand, and the golden bird started to hop up and down in its cage and to sing sweetly, and Helene spoke and became beautiful again. The king was well, and could move his hands and feet. And when the king heard what had happened, he had his other sons thrown into the dungeon.

On his wedding day, Alexander went out east of the castle and found the fox waiting for him.

"Do as I say and not as you wish," said the fox. "Take out your sword and cut off my tail and put it at my head, and cut off my head and put it at my tail."

Alexander protested that he could not do it, but the fox reminded him of his promise. So Alexander drew his sword. No sooner had he done as the fox had asked than there stood the king's half brother and true heir to the kingdom. Many years ago his stepmother had changed him into a fox so that her own son would inherit the throne.

Alexander's father offered to give up the throne. But

his half brother said, "Let me be king this evening only, and then let Alexander be king. We two old ones will be his advisors and give him support. And while I am king each shall have and keep his own. Alexander shall keep the three treasures of the world—the golden bird, the golden horse, and the fair Helene. And the gallows shall have what belongs to it." So Alexander's two brothers were hanged.

Then Alexander and Helene were married. The two elderly kings advised Alexander so well that he became the wisest king in the world. And the golden bird continued to sing for them, and whoever listened to its song knew neither sorrow nor sickness.

FRUIT SOUP

In Scandinavia Fruit Soup is served chilled for dessert. It may also be served as a condiment with ham or roast pork.

1 package mixed dried fruits
1 stick cinnamon, if desired
½ orange, unpeeled and sliced thin
2 tablespoons minute tapioca
¼ cup sugar
¼ cup raisins
1 apple, peeled and sliced
orange juice, if needed

Wash dried fruits, cover with cold water, and soak for half an hour. Add cinnamon stick, orange slices, tapioca, and sugar. Simmer until almost tender (about 10 minutes), stirring occasionally.

Stir in raisins and apple slices and cook gently 5 to 10 minutes longer. Mixture will be thick. Let stand in refrigerator 12 hours. Serve cold. If mixture is too thick, add a little orange juice. *Serves 6 to 8.*

To determine the nature of his future bride, a young man was to place on the table at midnight three glasses, one filled with wine, one with beer, and the third with water. During the night the spirit of his future bride would come and drink from one of the glasses. If she drank from the glass of wine it meant she would be of noble birth. If she drank from the glass of beer she would be the equal of her husband. If she drank from the glass of water nothing but poverty was in store for the couple!

The water-horse possessed magical powers. It could live at the bottom of a lake, but when it was on land it could gallop about as an ordinary horse or change into a man.

Cledog and the Ceffyl-dŵr *

(from Wales)

In days long past, deep within a blue mountain lake in central Wales, there lived a *ceffyl-dŵr,* a water-horse. At certain times of the year he arose from the water, and could be seen in the evening feeding with the cattle that pastured near the edge of the lake. He appeared the most beautiful animal that could ever exist. He was all black, and very glossy, with a flowing white mane and tail. On his proudly held head was a jewelled bridle, and on his back a richly tooled saddle with stirrups of silver.

But if a human dared approach him, the small horse's eyes flashed and he snorted, tossing his head so violently the person quickly withdrew. If, however, the man over-

* Kĕff'ĭl-dōōr

came his fear and went nearer and nearer to where the horse stood pawing the earth savagely, the little animal would grow quiet and mild. He would even allow himself to be mounted. Then, swift as an arrow from the bow, the wild horse would plunge into the lake. The rider would never be seen again, and the horse would not feed for a year and a day.

Near the lake lived Cledog, his wife, and their young daughter, Efa. Cledog was a hauler of wood and, since he couldn't afford a beast of burden, day after day he hitched himself to his wagon and pulled great loads of logs all the way to the prince's palace. Cledog's one ambition was to tame the water-horse, but he seemed no nearer to it this year than he was last, or the year before that. Finally, he decided to visit the wise woman who lived nearby, and ask her aid.

"Come in, Cledog," Morvyth called in answer to his knock. "What can I do for you?"

Cledog slumped wearily onto the bench she indicated, and answered directly. "You know I have no animal to pull my wagon." Morvyth nodded and waited. Now Cledog, suddenly timid, didn't know just how to proceed. "If only," he began, "I could manage . . . somehow . . . to . . ."

Morvyth interrupted his halting words. "If only you could catch the water-horse, you would have a handsome beast to haul your logs for you," she finished.

This time, Cledog nodded and waited.

"Oh, I can help you," she said, "if such is your wish. Do exactly as I say, and the water-horse is yours." The wise woman stared into space and frowned, then spoke slowly, "But remember, Cledog, nothing is ever gained without paying. Maybe not in money, but in a more serious way. It is not in the nature of water-horses to labor. Are you prepared to pay a great price for such a catch?" she questioned.

Cledog thought of all he owned—his tiny hut, enough land to grow a bit of food for the family, and the ragged clothes he wore. Then he thought of years and years of pulling logs with his own bowed, aching back—and he had the answer. "I am ready to pay," he said simply.

"Then listen carefully," she admonished. "On St. John's Eve—the twenty-fourth of June—much magic can be wrought. On that day, when the sun passes its highest point, kill the one speckled ox among the cattle. Skin it and put the hide around yourself. Then walk to the lake on your hands and feet, as if you were truly an ox. Just at sunset, the water-horse will arise and begin feeding. Since you will look like an ox, he will take no notice of you. Show no fear, and gradually place yourself between the horse and the lake. Then it's up to you. His bridle has no bit or chin-strap, and when you are near enough, you can easily grab it. If you succeed in taking it, the beautiful black horse will be

yours. If you don't . . ." Morvyth shrugged eloquently.

"I will not fail," answered Cledog, and went home to await St. John's Eve.

When it arrived, he followed the wise woman's directions precisely. Cledog's wife folded the hide around him so carefully that the cows accepted him as the ox he seemed to be.

Just at dusk, as Morvyth had predicted, the small horse rose majestically from the pool and began feeding. Pretending to nibble grass as he went, Cledog slowly worked himself between the horse and the water. Then, with a sudden movement he jerked the glittering bridle from the animal, and with the other hand caught him by the forelock.

"At last! I have you!" shouted Cledog joyfully, and began to lead the water-horse away.

"Yes, Cledog, you indeed have me," the *ceffyl-dŵr* replied in deep musical tones, for on St. John's Eve all animals in Wales can speak the human language. "I am yours to do your bidding until my saddle and bridle are returned to me by a maiden. Take warning, Cledog."

"That shall never be," the man vowed grimly, and as soon as he had stabled the beast he hid the trappings in the hay loft.

The handsome horse served Cledog faithfully. No road was too rough for him to travel, no load too heavy to pull, no fodder too coarse to eat. Now Cledog was able to haul

logs to the palace faster than the woodsmen could cut the trees. His back never ached and he was growing rich. His life was very pleasant.

Many years had passed thus when, one day, Cledog and his wife went to a fair in a nearby town, leaving Efa, their young daughter, to care for the horse. She had often fed him from her own hand, and ridden him to water. But this day, as she flung open the stable door, a sudden shaft of sunlight pierced the loft and a single, uncovered jewel in the bridle sparkled, casting ruby lights along one wall.

"Whatever is that?" Efa asked herself, and scrambled up to the loft. Scattering hay in all directions, she quickly discovered the saddle and bridle. "Where could these expensive things have come from?" she wondered. Then came the thought that now she could have a *real* ride.

To her surprise, the little water-horse neighed with delight as he watched her approach with the equipment. In a short time he was harnessed, and no sooner was Efa seated in the saddle than away he raced, with the wind's own swiftness, to the lake.

As the horse and his frightened rider dashed madly on, they met Cledog and his wife returning from the fair. With one horrified stare, Cledog realized what had happened. The beautiful black horse had indeed had his saddle and bridle returned to him by a maiden. But surely, he would not . . .

Without hesitation, the horse plunged—his rider on his back—into the deepest part of the lake. Too late, Cledog knew the price he must pay for not heeding the warnings of Morvyth and the horse himself.

With the money he had saved, Cledog was able to buy an ordinary animal and never had to haul logs with his own strength any more. But now his heart, rather than his back, ached. He had lost his lovely daughter. And although the lake never froze over, even in the coldest weather, and although Cledog stood watch every St. John's Eve as long as he lived, still hoping to see his daughter return, the black water-horse never again fed with the cattle by the blue mountain lake in central Wales.

MIDSUMMER FIRES

Midsummer bonfires may have been sun charms to warm the sun and give it energy. After the summer solstice the sun begins moving downward toward the horizon and days grow colder. People once believed that their corn and flax would grow as tall as the flames of their bonfires, or as high as the flames leaped over the embers.

Huge cartwheels covered with straw were set afire and sent rolling down the hills to represent the sun's descending course in the sky. If the wheels kept burning all the way down, it meant an abundant harvest or good fortune. Another belief was that the blazing wheel symbolized a wheel of fortune, and as the wheel went rolling away, the ill luck of the people went rolling away with it. Sometimes large round cheeses were used instead of the burning cartwheels.

The bonfires also were believed to protect against witches and evil spirits which might have gathered together during the cold dark winter. A form of this belief continued into the present century. During World War II, when the Nazis forbade the Danes their traditional Midsummer fires, the Swedes, across the Baltic Sea, set their beaches alight with fires as a protest against evil and to symbolize the conquest of darkness by light.

If you dance round nine bonfires on Midsummer Night you are sure to marry before the year is out.

A small piece of charcoal, taken from the site of a bonfire on St. John's Eve, and sewn up in the clothes of a woman, protects her against fairy plots, or from being kidnapped by the 'good people.'

In Irish folklore, a live coal from a St. John's fire is considered to bring luck to the house in which it is used to light the new fire on the family hearth.

To the Greeks, the Midsummer fires symbolized Demeter's torch while on her search for Persephone.

To the Norsemen, the Midsummer fires lighted their god, Balder, on his journey to the underworld, where he stayed six months and was reborn at the winter solstice (December 24th).

In ancient Ireland at Midsummer the people celebrated the festival with a strange dance which was religious in nature, and solar in its origin. The dancers circled about in a long line in imitation of the coils of a serpent, always moving from east to west. The meaning of the dance has been lost, but it was performed into the eighteenth century, with the dancers weaving in and out of the village streets.

The ancient Greeks performed a similar dance which they called "the Pyrrhic dance," from *pur,* meaning fire.

The waltz was originally a whorl or whirl which honored the sun.

MIDSUMMER FORTUNE

On St. John's Day, break an egg into a glass half-filled with water, place it on the windowsill, and let it remain untouched until sundown. The egg will assume a shape significant in your future—a lover, perhaps, a boat, or a castle.

Wee Meg Barnileg and the Fairies

(from Ireland)

There lived once by Lough Erne a rich farmer. He and the wife were a soft good-natured pair; come-easy-go-easy was the way they took the world and the world took them. They had one child, a girl by the name of Meg—Wee Meg Barnileg, they called her. Now there be's childher and childher, as well ye know; and ye might have traveled the world over to find one the match of Meg. She had a way of her own, and she had it entirely.

It was: "Come hither and go yonder. Fetch that and take this," all with a stamp of the foot and a toss of the head and a spoiled look in the eye.

When the pair went anywhere they fetched Meg with them, to fairs and feises, weddings and wakes; and when the neighbors put their eye to the window and saw the three of them coming they'd raise a wail ye could hear clear to Malin Head and say:

"Faith, there comes Meg. Hide the best platter in under the bed, and the new butter crock in the loft. Take the fresh eggs from the hens and put them in the churn, back of the door. Tie the pig in the byre and pray the Holy Virgin that we'll end this day whole."

As her mother said proudly, Meg was a terribly observing child. She'd come into a cabin and stand in the middle of the floor and cast the two eyes about her, and what she didn't see wasn't worth a tinker's damn; and she was one of them pleasant kind that told everything she saw and more that she didn't.

"Mither," she'd say, "they've got the same ragged chintz at the windows and beds that they had when last we came. Wouldn't ye think they'd be getting new?" Or: "The creepy has a broken leg, the dirt's brushed into the corner yonder under the besom." Or: "See, Mither, the handle of this pitcher's been broke and put together again. Being so ugly, would ye think it was worth the trouble?" And like as not, to try the strength of the mending, she'd pull the handle away and the pitcher would crash down on the floor, gone entirely.

At a wake 'twas even pleasanter. She had a way of twitching the sleeve of this one and the skirt of that and asking in one of them far-reaching whispers: "Do you think it's true, now, what Barney Gallagher said of him afore he died —that he was the tight-fistedest man in Donegal? Sure, I heard my father say, many's the time, that he'd rather bargain with the Divel himself. Didn't ye, Father?"

And when she wasn't pestering other folk in their cabins —dead or alive—she was pestering the creatures. She had a way of tweaking feathers out of the cocks' tails as they went by, and pulling the pigs' bristles behind the ears. And for good measure she'd be feeling for the little hairs in the soft of a dog's mouth and tug quick at them, while the dog, poor creature, would let out such a howl as would curdle the heart of the dead.

She'd eat what she'd like and leave what she liked; and she had that whiny sing-song voice that sounded like a young calf with the spring colic. Ye could tell her by the voice without ever laying eyes on her at all, at all. "Look at me beat the dog. I'm not afeared of him. Look at me—if I don't like the stir-about I can throw it out and eat currant bread instead."

And you'd hear the neighbors say: "The holy saints protect us—there's Meg." And ye'd hear the soft, wheedling voice of the mother after her, "Meg darling, leave the dog be an' put down the new crock afore ye do be breaking it.

Eat the bit of porridge like a good child and your da'll buy thruppence worth o' sweeties at the shop."

The neighbors could laugh or cry about it—whichsomever they pleased—and swear they would bar the door fast against her coming next time. But come she would and there was no end to the trouble she could raise. Days of peace in the neighborhood were rarer than saints' days; and before Meg was nine even her mother, who doted on the breath she drew, began to grow poor- and pinched-looking. Not a decent, entire piece of clothing would the child keep on her back. It was a fresh dress mornings, another noontimes, and often another evenings. She tore and she dirtied with as free a hand as if her wee body had been covered just with skin and feathers—same as a creature's. The neighbors would see lights through the windows long after midnight, and they would say:

"Aye, if ye rear an' raise a child like Meg ye can set up nights paying for it. Like as not, the poor soul has a basketful o' rags to mend and wash afore morning."

At last Midsummer Day came, as gentle a time as any in the whole year to be seeing the fairies. Wee Meg Barnileg went out in a neighbor's yard where they had tied the watch dog. She had fetched a bit of currant cake along with her, and by way of teasing him she'd reach out the cake as if to be giving it him, and then snatch it out of reach as he pulled for it at the end of his chain. Well, he jumped hard

for it once, and how she laughed at the foolish look on him as his jaws snapped together on nothing at all. He jumped hard twice; he jumped hard the third time. But the chain broke, and failing to get the cake he took a nip of Meg's leg by way of compensation. Ye should have heard the hurly-burly the pair raised the length and breadth of Ireland, Meg crying and the dog howling. The neighbors came running. Some were for killing the dog and burning the leg. They rushed this way and that for a gun and a pair of red-hot tongs, crying and wringing their hands. And so mixed up and muddle-minded did they get that they couldn't tell at the last was it the dog or Meg they'd shoot.

"If it was me ye're asking, I'd say shoot them both and make good work of it," said one of the sour-dispositioned neighbors who had stood more from Meg than most.

" 'Tis a good dog—leave him be. But the child is bad entirely. If ye must shoot one, shoot her," was another's bit of advice.

It was Wee Meg herself who settled it; she took one good look at the hard set faces about her, and then she took to her heels and put distance aplenty atween her and the neighbors.

She ran clear over Binn-Ban and on to the pasture beyond; and she found a field where the men were making hay. By that time she had run the fear out of her, just; and she was ready for new sport. She broke a rake, and got tangled up in the forks. She tossed the cocks and fell off the

hay-cart, till the patience of the men was gone entirely and they drove her from the field. She went but a bit of a ways, howsomever, and there in a corner under a blackthorn bush she found the men's tea in a pail with a covered dish of scones to eat with it. She took as much of it as she liked and scattered what she didn't like, and then she lay down in the shade of the last hay-cock in the field; and being a bit worn from the day's doing she went fast asleep.

She slept the day out. The men finished all but that corner of the field where Meg lay, and went home. The cows came back to their byres for the milking, the sun set; the birds called their vespers across the moors, one to another; and the moon came up, making as gentle and lovely a night as ye could be asking for.

Meg woke quick-like, the sound of voices close beside her ear. She cocked one eye in the direction the sound came; and there she saw a crowd of fairies—wee men as high as your hand—in green jerkins and red caps, dragging small rakes.

" 'Tis a poor dancing we'll have this night," said one wee voice. "We'll never get the hay raked tidy after the way Meg's tumbled it."

" 'Tis not the hay I'm minding," said another. " 'Tis the scattering of scones and cold praties and stir-about, cluttering up everything. I'd like to get my hands on that untidy child once."

"Aye, get them and keep them!" The wee voice that spoke this time was full of a terrible anger. "Think of them piles of dirty dresses down below—and the broken crocks and pitchers and whatnots we have to look at. It fair spoils the place and makes an eyesore for honest fairy folk."

"We'll catch her some fine night. Ye'll see," said the weest man of them all, standing just the other side of the hay-cock from Meg. "If not one Midsummer Night, then another," and he chuckled way down to the tips of his wee green brogues.

Now maybe ye are thinking that with such a conversation going on 'twould put a morsel of fear in Meg, and she'd have the sense to lay quiet and keep a still tongue in her head. But ye are no knowing Meg. There was never a conversation yet that she wasn't for getting in the middle of it, and as for fear—she'd seen the small little men and knew it would take fifty of them to make the size of her. She was just going to show them what she thought of them, and more besides. So up she jumps and flicks her skirt and tosses her head and cocks her chin, the way it would look saucy, and over the hay-cock she jumps, landing right in the middle of them.

"Well, here I am!" says she, in her smartest voice. "Here I am! Now what are ye going to do about it?" And she chins them all in turn.

For the time it takes to draw three breaths it was so still ye could have heard the new grass growing. The wee men said never a word but just looked at Meg; quiet, solemn, and steady. Then up speaks one:

"Make the fairy ring, wee men," says he. And with that the fairies drew close in a circle about her and began a weaving dance, and in their small, wee voices they began for to sing:

Ring, ring in a fairy ring,
Fairies dance and fairies sing.
Round, round on the soft green ground—
Never a sound—never a sound.
Sway, sway as the grasses sway
Down by the lough at the dawn of the day;
Circle about as we leap and spring
Fairy men in a fairy ring.
Light on your toe, light on your heel,
One by one in a merry, merry reel;
Fingers touching fingers so—
Round and round and round we go!

The song finished, they clapped their hands and kicked their heels and spun themselves about like a hundred green tops and cried: "Move hand or foot if ye can, Wee Meg Barnileg."

Meg tried with all her might and main but she couldn't stir hand and she couldn't stir foot.

"Open your mouth and make some of those fine courteous remarks that ye're so famous for making," they cried again.

Meg opened her mouth wide to scream but her tongue stuck fast to the roof of her mouth and not so much as a sigh came out of it.

"Look yonder then at the grand substitute we are leaving behind for ye so when they search this way before midnight they will find ye fast asleep beside the hay-cock." And with that they fetched out as ugly a fairy changeling as ye could ask for. They blew the breath of a fairy spell on him and he grew and changed, all in the wink of an eye, until he was the spitten image of Meg—face, dress, and boots. The thing stretched itself out in the very hollow Meg had made in the hay and was fast asleep in a whisk.

"Now," cried the wee men, "we'll pinch Meg below," and with that a hundred strong wee hands pinched her legs and arms till she jumped straight into the hay-cock and fell down a long black hole, landing with a grand tumble at the bottom. Looking all about, she found she was in the very heart of a fairy rath and it all shining like a thousand glowworms, soft and lovely.

"Now look about ye," cried the wee men, who were close on her heels. "See our fine dancing floor littered up with the food ye've been throwing away since ye were weaned. Here's the rake—tidy it up and put it into those creels yonder; and be saving with it, too, for that's all ye'll have in the way of victuals while ye're down here."

So Meg found herself with a rake in her hands and the ground covered as far as she could see with cold praties and crusts of oaten bread and lumps of stir-about, and crumbs of cake and whatnot. Well, it was a slow business. She

raked the biggest and swept the smallest and she worked till she was tired and aching in every joint. And hungry! She could feel the sides of her stomach scraping each other. "I'll not eat this mess!" she screamed. "If I work for ye, the least manners ye can have is to bring me a mug of fresh milk and a slice of fresh bread."

But the fairy men only laughed. "There'll be nothing fresh for them that has wasted good food like yourself. And the sooner ye begin to eat it up, the sooner will it be gone. Not a decent morsel will ye get till then."

So the end was that Wee Meg Barnileg was driven by hunger to eat up her own leavings. How many days it took to gather them all up and fetch them away I cannot be telling ye, but gone they were at last, and Meg had her first sup of good fresh milk and her first bite of bread. They tasted sweeter than all the currant cake she had ever stuffed into her poor silly stomach.

After that the fairies took her into another great place cluttered over with torn and dirty dresses. There was every stitch she had ever worn since she'd been big enough to creep about the floor. "I'll never wash them, not if I die in your ugly old rath," said Meg, and she stamped her feet and stuck out her tongue, the full length of it.

"Hoity-toity," said the wee men. "Ye'd better mind your tongue better than that. For after ye've washed and mended ye'll have to pick out all the sharp, ugly words ye've ever

spoken; pick them out from the kind ones. We don't be leaving the two mix. And pulling nettles, or picking burrs out of lamb's wool is pleasanter business than sorting the two, as ye'll soon find out."

So Meg closed her mouth tight, and set to on the washing. If raking up the food had been bad, this was worse. An old fairy woman brought her where the washtubs stood; and when the dresses were clean she had then to starch and to iron and to mend. If the first had taken her days, the last took her weeks and months.

"Will I never get by the work!" moaned Meg at last. "Will I never get back to my own dear lovely home and my precious parents?"

"Lovely and precious ye treated them," laughed the old fairy woman. "I'm thinking they've been having a grand rest entirely since ye've been gone. As for the neighbors, they've settled down to enjoying life for the first time."

When the dresses were clean and mended and folded and piled neatly into baskets the way they could be carried off, the wee men took Meg into another place and there, like a great field of nettles, were growing all the ugly, sharp words that had ever fallen from her tongue. Growing in the midst of them, here and there, were a few bits of sweet pretty things like flowers—pink and white and blue—struggling to get their heads up above the crowding thorns.

"Ye can see for yourself that it's time something was done

about this," says one of the fairy men. "Give ye a year or two more and there'd not be a thing worth growing in this garden. Ye are to pull the nettles and leave the place cleared to give them poor wee blossoms a chance to multiply."

Meg didn't trust her tongue. She nodded her head, just got down on her knees, and began pulling. She pulled till her hands were swollen and like two red lumps of burning turf. Her back ached, her knees were rubbed bare. She cried and she wailed but she learned to keep her tongue still, for every time she let an angry word drop, it took root right under her eye and made one more nettle to pull.

But at last the place was cleared and all alone stood those few wee blossoms like shipwrecked sailors on a desert island. "The poor wee sickly things," said Meg to herself. And then she sighed. "If the place was growing full of them what a pretty place it would be!" And because she was through, and she felt for the first time a bit of gladness, she picked up her skirts and began for to dance.

Now the fairies love dancing, and when they saw Meg turning out her toes so nicely, and bending and swaying so like a flower they clapped their hands and laughed and said: "So, ye can do one pretty thing, Meg. Will ye dance for us tonight, under the moon?"

"Sure and I will," said Meg.

So that night, the fairy men brought Meg back to the top of green earth. She felt the soft grass under her feet, and she

felt the soft wind blowing her cheek, and she smelt the sweetness of the new-cut hay and roses blooming far off in the neighbors' gardens. And it came to her suddenly a thing she had heard one of them say: "If a body gets taken by the fairies and she can find a four-leaf shamrock and make a wish, she can be free of them forever."

The minute the fairy pipers began to play, Meg took her skirts and began to dance. She danced over the field where the new shamrock had begun to grow; and every chance she got she bent low and looked sharp at the bits of green leaves to see could she count four on any one of them. At last as the moon clipped the top of Binn-Ban she saw at her feet a shamrock with four leaves to it; and with a glad bit of a laugh she picked it, holding it high over her head. "I want to be home!" she cried.

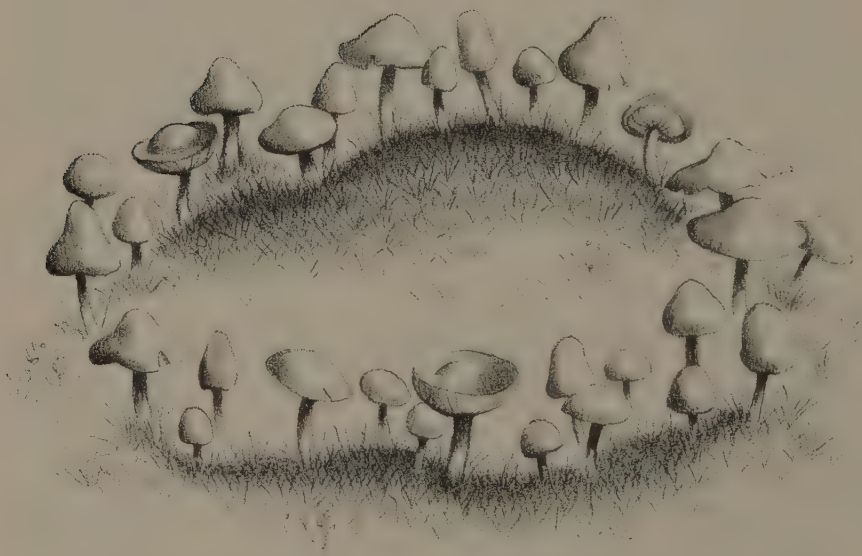
And home she was, in her own wee bed. Beside her sat her mother and a great bottle of physic and a spoon to take it with.

"Dear me," said Meg, natural-like, "I hope you didn't shoot the dog. He'd never have nipped me if I hadn't the life plagued out of him."

"Glory be to God!" sobbed her poor mother. " 'Tis the first word ye have spoken in a year."

And from that day till the day she died Meg minded her own business and kept a civil tongue in her head and ate the food that was put before her. She had a wedding of her own

one grand day and raised a fine brood of childher. And like as not, if ye went tomorrow to Lough Erne and took notice of a well-bred child, the neighbors would be telling ye: "Aye, that child is the great-great-grandchild of Wee Meg Barnileg."



IRISH CURRANT CAKE

4 cups all-purpose flour
½ cup or ¼ pound butter
¾ cup plus 1 teaspoon sugar
1 cup buttermilk or sour milk
3 eggs, well beaten
1 cup currants
pinch grated nutmeg
1 teaspoon grated lemon rind
1 teaspoon baking soda

Preheat over to 350° F.

Work flour and butter together with fingers until the mixture looks like fine bread crumbs. Add ¾ cup of sugar and blend well. Add the milk to the flour mixture. Fold in the beaten eggs, currants, nutmeg, and lemon rind and beat for a full minute.

Mix 1 teaspoon sugar with the soda and add this to the batter. Beat the batter for a full 3 minutes. Pour into well-greased 9-inch soufflé pan.

Bake for 1½ hours or until firm, and the surface is lightly browned. When the "cake" is cool, slice it as you would bread. Serve with butter and marmalade.

LOVE CHARMS

Midsummer is a favorite time for weddings. It is the special festival of lovers, and St. John is the protector of lovers.

In olden times young couples held hands and leaped over the glowing embers of the Midsummer fires to bring themselves good luck and to make certain they would never be parted. Sweethearts peered at each other through garlands across the flames, then tossed the flowers into the fires for luck.

It was the custom in Poland for each girl to weave a garland of wild flowers, decorate it with gay ribbons, and fasten a lighted candle across the center. Then she threw the wreath into a stream. If the wreath drifted to shore, it meant the girl would never marry. If it sank, she would die before the year's end. If it floated downstream, she would surely wed. The young man who caught the wreath would marry the girl to whom it belonged. It's likely that the boys hid in boats along the riverbanks and tried to capture their sweethearts' garlands.

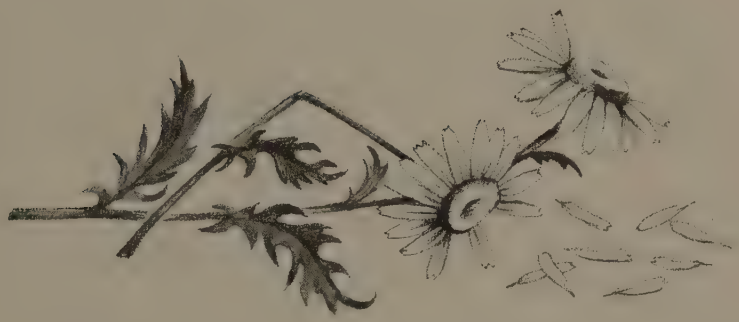
Pick nine kinds of flowers and slip them under your pillow on Midsummer Night to dream of the person you'll marry. But you must not say a word while you are gathering the flowers or you will never marry.

Flowers were used to divine love.

The daisy, or day's eye (the sun), is sacred to St. John. In the language of flowers it signifies faithfulness.

To tell if your love is true, pluck the petals from a daisy, repeating: "He/she loves me, he/she loves me not."

To tell how deeply you are loved, pluck the petals and repeat, "A little, much, passionately, not at all!"



To tell when you will be married, pluck the petals and repeat, "This year, next year, sometime, never," or pluck a handful of daisies with your eyes closed. The number of daisies in the bunch tells how many years will pass before you will marry.

"Midsummer Men" were used in love divination. To make "Midsummer Men," slips of the plant orpine were planted in pairs on Midsummer Eve. If the slips leaned toward each other in the morning it meant that the lovers were true and the couple would marry.

A ring which appeared to be of the fifteenth century was found in a plowed field near Cawood in Yorkshire, England. Its decoration was two orpine plants joined by a true love knot with the motto above, *Ma fiancée velt,* that is, "My sweetheart wills" or "is desirous." The stalks of the two plants were bent towards each other, in token that the man and woman they represented were to come together in marriage. The motto under the design was *Joye l'amour feu* (joy/love/fire).

Diccon and Elfrida

(from England)

In a little cottage, on the edge of a field, lived young Diccon the goatherd. He pastured his goats in the field, where they browsed on the grass and the clover-leaves and drank from a pool in the shade of a sallow, while he sat close by to see that they did not stray; and at night he penned them in an enclosure of hurdles, beside the cottage. He milked his goats morning and evening, and from the rich milk he made cheeses; and every seventh day he would walk along the little track that led from the cottage down to the roadway, and five miles along the roadway he would reach the village, and there, in the market-place, he would sell his cheeses, and thus he earned enough to live.

His father had kept goats before him, in the very same way, and his father's father, pasturing their herds in the field and walking to the village with their cheeses every market-day; so it would never have seemed possible to Diccon to do otherwise. He knew that there were different ways of life, but he had never thought of them as being for him.

It is true that like every one he dreamt dreams, especially on lazy summer afternoons when the bees droned in the thyme and even the goats were content not to browse, but sat instead gazing peacefully before them at nothing at all; or on long winter evenings, when the goats were penned in early and the cheeses all made and stored away, and he could sit beside the hearth and think of what ever he wished, while the wind that raced over the hills blustered about the cottage and blew the sharp, eye-watering woodsmoke back into the single room of the cottage through the smoke-hole in the roof.

At those times Diccon wondered what it would be like to be a seaman and sail upon the seas and visit strange lands; or a man-at-arms and fight in battles and win great glory and renown; or yet a merchant and trade in silks, spices, and other merchandise. He knew that such merchants, with their strings of laden pack-horses, sometimes passed through the village on their way to the city; and he knew that even the village lads had sometimes gone to be men-at-arms; and he knew that beyond the hills, somewhere, lay the sea, though

he had never set eyes on it and did not know what it might look like. But it never came to his mind that he could be anything but a goatherd, as his father had been and his grandfather; and, living in his little cottage, quite alone, he was content.

As well he might have been, for the cottage, though small, was his own, given to his great-grandfather for some special service by the lord on whose lands it stood. There was a neat bed of herbs before the door and one briar-bush, which his father had planted for his mother's sake when he brought her home as a bride, and a wild cherry-tree that spread its branches above the roof of thatch, and shook its white locks in the breeze in May. And the field where he pastured the goats was wide enough, with a little stream, and the grass grew high and sweet there, with clover, pink and white, and purple vetch, and in the spring-time cowslips like a little bunch of keys dangling from a stalk. And beyond this field was more grassland, and beyond that yet more.

But beyond the grassland the hills began. They were low hills and gently rounded, and covered in soft, springing turf, where bloomed little scabious and yellow hawkweed and the low-growing purple thistles that spread their spiky leaves flat upon the ground. On those hills were no harsh rocks and no tall trees, but only little weather-worn chalk pebbles and here and there a bush of golden gorse or broom,

and the horizon which they made was one unbroken, gently undulating line.

Diccon rose early in the mornings. At dawn he would already be unfastening the entrance to the pen of his goats and calling to them, each by name, and they would answer to him in their bleating voices, so that by evening he would be tired and ready for rest. In summer, when the sun set late, he would go to bed with the birds and be asleep by twilight. Up again at daybreak he would not have had a wink of sleep too much.

One midsummer eve, when he was just twenty years old, his day's work being over, Diccon ate his supper of cheese and bread, with goat's milk in a wooden cup, sitting in his cottage doorway in the last rays of the setting sun as it sank behind the hills. At dusk he yawned, rubbed his eyes, and went inside. He closed the wattle door and lay down on his bed of dried bracken spread with goatskins, and was soon fast asleep.

A little while after, a branch of the wild cherry-tree that grew beside the cottage leant down and tapped at the door, and at the sound Diccon awoke. He rose and opened the door and peered out to see what had woken him, but all he could see was the dim garden-patch and the unmoving shape of the cherry-tree and the dark field beyond. "I must have dreamt that I heard some one call to me," he thought.

Yet as he was about to turn away and go to lie down

again he caught sight in the distance of the deep-blue shadow that was the hills, and above, the paler blue of the summer night sky. But instead of the familiar, clear outline of the horizon, dividing the hills and the sky, there was a frieze of blue clouds, lighter than the hillside and darker than the sky, like a line of trees growing along the topmost ridge of the hills, where there had never been trees before.

Diccon stared at them. "One might think that they were real trees," he said to himself, "instead of only clouds." Yet while he watched them the thought came to him that they were, indeed, real trees and not mere clouds; and the more he saw them, growing there in the distance, the more he wanted to walk among them and see what he could find.

At last he pulled on his tunic, and slipping out of the cottage he ran across the field, his bare feet brushing through the dew. He ran over the grassland, over more grassland, and then he was at the foot of the hills, and up above him was the line of cloud-trees, a little darker now and less distinct, but still there.

He hurried upward, and the sky grew a deeper blue, and when he reached the top of the hills the moon was out, and there was the line of trees before him; and they were not clouds, but trees, real trees—oak and ash and elm and beech —where never had grown trees before.

"From the other side of the hills I have heard that one may have sight of the sea," said Diccon to himself. "But on

the other side of these trees what will there be?"

Yet he was not afraid, nor did he hesitate, but only was he drawn on by a great curiosity; and going straight forward he stepped in among the trees and through them, and there, on the other side, was an open glade; and the moment he set foot in it he was in the fairy world. A strange, sweet music sounded in his ears, and he saw before him figures dancing in the moonlight. Tall, slim white shapes, with graceful arms and garments of green, and squat black shapes, with lumbering feet and moleskin coats; and over all a wild, sad-yet-happy singing that caught at his very heart.

He came closer to the dancers to watch them with wonder and longing; and then, almost before he knew it, they had taken his hands and carried him off to join the throng. "Come, dance with us, mortal, this is midsummer night. Come, dance with us till the dawn."

Around and around, about and about, he danced with the fairy people—fairy men with jackets of green and curling toes to their shoes and golden circlets upon their hair, fairy women in clinging green gowns, golden bracelets upon their white arms, and flowers or fireflies for jewels in their unbraided hair, and dwarfish creatures, dark and bright-eyed as animals, with horns or tails or bat-wings, and piercing, shrill voices as they sang.

And as he danced in their revels on midsummer night

there was one fairy maiden there whom Diccon noticed above all others—green-yellow eyes like the fresh, young leaves of spring, long, long golden hair, wreathed with a chaplet of wild roses, a green silk gown, with a fringed silver girdle, and bare white feet beneath. Ever and again in the dance he would find her next to him, her cool hand in his and a scent of wild roses on the air; and though they might be separated by the movements of the dance, again and again would she be at his side.

Diccon danced, until his head reeled and he would have rested; and then he felt cool fingers tighten on his wrist, and a voice whispered in his ear, "Come away."

She led him to a bank where tall sorrel and moon-daisies grew high among the grass. They sat, and he looked at her and smiled, and she laughed at him and tossed her long, long hair. He laid his head in her lap, and she stroked his brown curls and sang to him, a little fairy song for him alone; and in the distance he could hear the dancers revelling and the strange, wild music of their pipes. He slept a space, and no sleep had ever seemed to him more sweet.

When he awoke he looked at her again. "Lady, I could stay with you for ever."

She shook her head. "You may stay only until the dawn," she said.

He hardly considered her words. "The dawn is hours

away." He smiled and picked moon-daisies and made from them a chain to hang about her neck. "How are you named, lady?"

"Elfrida."

"It is a lovely name, and one that I have never heard before." He touched the ends of her long, long hair. "It is a name which will always live close to my heart."

But at last she looked up at the sky above the glade. "You must go, mortal, for it is almost dawn."

At first he would not go, but she rose and held out her hand to him. "Come, or it will be too late."

She led him through the trees, as silent as a shadow, and they stood at the edge of the line of oak and ash and elm and beech and looked down the hillside in the early grey light. "Kiss me once," she said, "and go."

But when he had kissed her he knelt at her feet and clasped her in his arms. "I cannot live without you. Let me stay with you."

"You do not know what you are asking, mortal. You will come to harm from the fairy people if you stay here with me, and bitterly you will regret it."

"I would regret nothing were I only with you, Elfrida."

She shook her head. "Go, I beg of you, for I love you, too, and I would not see you hurt." She looked across to the east. "And, oh, go quickly, for the dawn is almost here."

She pulled at his wrists, until he rose to his feet, and then she thrust him from her out of the shadow of the trees.

But he clung to her hand and said, "Come with me, since I may not stay with you. Come with me to my cottage, for I will have no other wife." And even while she hesitated he drew her to him, out on to the hillside, away from the shade of the fairy trees; and far off a cock crowed, and the sound rose up on the still morning air.

"Quickly," she said, "run quickly." And hand in hand they fled down the hillside, pausing only once, half-way down, to look back at the top of the hill; and Diccon saw by the first rays of the rising sun that the cloud-trees which had never been there were gone, and the grassy curve of the hills stood clear and clean against the saffron sky.

They went together across the grassland; and outside the cottage, from the briar-bush that had been his mother's, he plucked a pink rose for her gown, before carrying her over his threshold.

For a year they were very happy together—no two people could have been happier—though Elfrida could neither spin nor cook, nor yet sew a seam. But the goats loved her and gave more milk for her; the herbs in the garden had never been more plentiful than when she tended them; the water which she drew from the spring was fresher and purer than ever before; and in the autumn she found berries where it might have been thought there were none, and mushrooms

where there had never been mushrooms before. And to Diccon she was a continual joy and a delight.

But when a full year had gone round and midsummer eve was there again she said to him, "The fairy people will come for me to-night. You must bar them out unless you wish to lose me." And she told him what he must do.

He cut rowan-branches with their unripe berries like bunches of green beads, and nailed them above the door and across the window-place, and laid them on the thatch, over the smoke-hole; and upon the threshold he set his iron reaping-hook. And all day they waited in the cottage, like two people who dread the coming of a thing and yet will be glad when it has come, for then the waiting will be over.

At dusk the line of clouds that were trees appeared on the brow of the hills, and after dark there was a knocking on the wattle door and a rattling at the window-shutter and a wind blowing down the smoke-hole, and a voice calling from outside, "Come out, Elfrida, come out." But she answered never a word.

All night there were voices, crying and sighing and wailing and cajoling, all about the cottage. High voices, deep voices, sweet voices, fearful voices—fairy voices calling, "Come out to us, Elfrida. Come out to us, for we are lonely for you. Come out to us, Elfrida, our sister." But she tightened Diccon's arm around her where they sat, afraid, before

the hearth, and she answered them never a word. And at dawn the voices died away and were gone.

Another year of happiness passed for Diccon and Elfrida, and then midsummer eve was there again; and again Diccon hung rowan above the doorway and across the window-place and over the smoke-hole, and laid the reaping-hook upon the threshold.

At dusk the cloud-trees appeared once more, and when it was dark the fairy people came, singing and calling and sighing. "Open the door, Elfrida, our sister. Open the door and come out to us. We have waited long for you." But she clasped her arms around Diccon and clung to him; and he stroked her long, long hair and was afraid. And all night the fairy people called and wailed about the cottage, rattling at the window-shutter and crying down the smoke-hole; and at dawn they went away, their voices dying in the distance, over the hills.

A third year passed, and Diccon thought there could be no joy like this, in his cottage with Elfrida; and then it was midsummer eve yet once again, and he guarded the door and smoke-hole and the window-place with rowan-boughs and laid the reaping-hook upon the threshold.

With the dusk there returned the trees at the top of the hills—the trees like clouds; and at dark the fairy people came, crying and calling and laughing. And their voices,

high and low, clear and dim, all called to him at once. "Open the door to us, Diccon, who stole our sister. Open the door and see us waiting here."

Elfrida held him close to her and whispered, "Do not listen to them. Do not answer them."

But Diccon raised his head and cried out, "You may go away, you fairy people. Go away back to your hills to dance, for I shall never open the door to you."

And then from without the cottage there was only silence, and no more voices calling.

After an hour or so Diccon said to Elfrida, "They have gone, my dearest, and we have no more need to fear."

But she shook her head. "I know them better than you know them," she said. "Never believe that they have gone."

"You are wrong, for there is no sound at all from them," he said. "They have grown weary of asking for you, and now they will leave us in peace."

"No," she answered. "They are my people. I knew them for centuries before you were born, and I am not wrong in this."

He comforted her and kissed her, yet she shivered in his arms. "You are cold," he said. "I will heat you a cupful of milk, that you may drink it and be warmed."

He poured goat's milk from a jug into his copper pan, and knelt beside the fire with his back to her, heating it over the embers; and in the quiet and peace and warmth he

thought of how happy he had been for three years with his fairy woman, and remembered the first midsummer night that he had seen her, dancing beyond the trees that were not really there, at the top of the hills. And thinking his thoughts he only watched the milk to see that it should not boil over, with a little part of his mind; for the rest he was sitting on a bank of moon-daisies and sorrel, half asleep in the moonlight, while Elfrida sang to him.

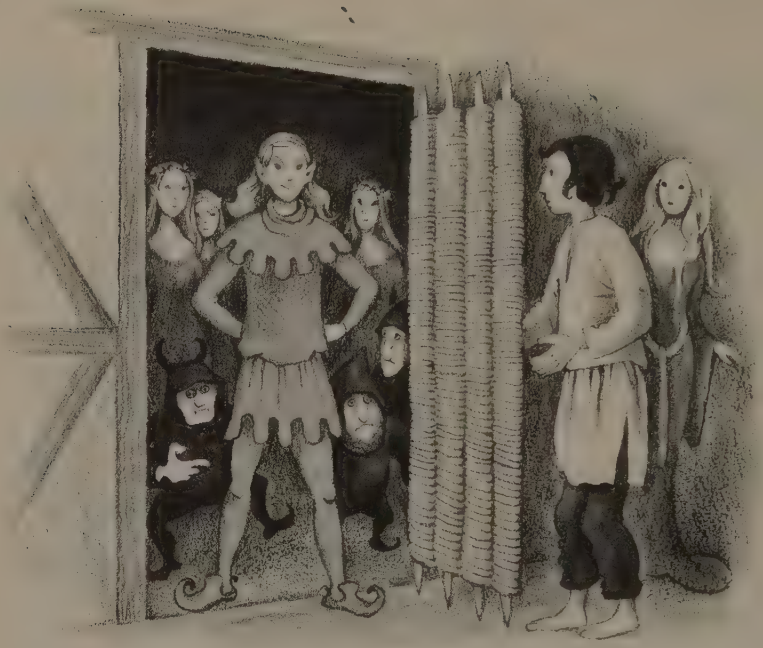
Lost in his memories, he had forgotten where he was or what he was doing, when there was a sudden beating at the door and Elfrida's voice called to him in terror and anguish from the garden-patch outside. "Let me in, Diccon, let me in. It is I, Elfrida. Open the door and let me in."

He started up, spilling the milk into the fire, where it sizzled and hissed, and jumping to his feet he ran to the door. "I am coming, my dearest, I am coming."

Elfrida sprang up from the bed of dried bracken and ran after him across the room. "Diccon, do not open the door."

But her voice was lost in the crying insistence and the knocking from outside. "Oh, quickly, Diccon, quickly. Open the door and let me in. If you love me open the door and let me come in." He thrust back the wooden bar and kicked aside the reaping-hook and unlatched the door and flung it wide for Elfrida to come in.

In the doorway stood a young prince of the fairy people, clad in green and gold, with slanting eyes and a mocking



smile; and behind him were countless tall, slim, pale figures, murmuring in the night, and small black shapes like dark shadows, chattering in glee.

Diccon looked back over his shoulder into the room for an instant and saw Elfrida standing there, her white hands clasped together, and knew that he had been tricked. He stepped away from the door in fear, and the prince of the fairy people slipped through, and the fairy people came after him into the cottage.

The prince spoke in a gentle, dreamy voice, "So you, rash goatherd, not content with a mortal maid, must needs steal away one of our people to be your bride. Bitterly, bitterly shall you regret it now, for you shall become as no more

than a dead brown leaf, to be blown by the wind where it will. Your home shall know you no more, and your goats shall bleat after you in vain." He raised his hand over Diccon, and his lips parted to speak the words which would shrivel him into a leaf.

But the words were not spoken, for Elfrida stepped between them and stood before Diccon. "He is not to blame," she said, "for I went willingly with him. Indeed, it was I who persuaded him, and what mortal may withstand the persuasions of our people? For are we not more beautiful by far than they? Are our words not more beguiling and our kisses sweeter? Who may oppose us? Blame him not, for the fault was mine. Do with me what you will."

The prince of the fairy people laughed, and his hand fell to his side. "As you wish, my sister. We shall let him be. Whether he is a dead brown leaf or a man, it is nothing to us. And he will have regrets enough, having once known your smiles and your kisses and now knowing them no more. Come you back with us, Elfrida." And he took her hand in his.

Diccon clasped her other hand and said, "I cannot let you go. Stay with me, and I will protect you. Only stay with me, my dearest."

Sadly she shook her head. "You have now no protection yourself from my people, since you have let them into your home. And I must go with them, for they will not harm you

if I leave you now. But, oh, Diccon, I will love you for always, and I will come back to you, I swear it. Yet look well for me, for I may not be the same as you see me now."

He tried to hold her in his arms and keep her with him, but she was drawn from his grasp and out through the door, the fairy people pressing after her, and Diccon was alone in his cottage.

Up on the hills, beyond the trees which were not there, Elfrida was judged by her people. "You shall become as a stone or a tree or a rock," they said, "and so remain for ever."

"No," she cried, "not that. For I have given my word to the mortal I love that I shall return to him, and even the fairy people must keep their promises."

And they, whose hearts were pitiless, even they gave her her desire. "You may choose what shape you will," they said, "and change that shape once in every seven years. And if your mortal lover should know you in another form, and recognize you for Elfrida, then you will be restored to your own appearance, even as you are now. Yet you will be no longer one of the fairy people, for we reject you utterly, but a mortal woman to live out your brief span with your Diccon, and then, like him, to die. Let it be thus."

And Elfrida became a thrush, and flew from the hills over the grassland and alighted in the branches of the wild cherry-tree beside Diccon's cottage, and sang to him. The song told him of their life together, of their love for each other, and

of her promise kept and her return; that he might know her though she was a bird.

But he knew her not and he could not understand the song, and he only said, "Will you not fly away, brown thrush? You are breaking my heart. How can you sing when my head is bent with grief?"

For a year he waited for Elfrida to come back to him; and then it was midsummer eve again, and at dusk he looked out from the cottage and saw the cloud-trees upon the hills, and he thought, "If she is there to be found I shall find her tonight." And he set off across the grassland and up the hills.

But when he reached the top there were no trees there, only the dark night clouds in the blue night sky. And though he searched for hours, no trace of the fairy people could he find, nor hear their strange, sweet music. Yet from the top of the hills, over to the other side, as he had been told he might, between two distant hills he caught a glimpse of the sea, all silver in the moonlight.

He sighed. "She will not come," he said to himself. "She has forgotten me. Yet could I have expected otherwise? For is she not of the fairy people, who have a world of their own? What is it to one of them that I should grieve?" And he went sadly back to his cottage, with dragging steps, reaching it at dawn.

And from a branch of the wild cherry-tree, where it had waited all night, the thrush that was Elfrida broke into song.

But Diccon did not hear its singing, for he was weeping. "My life means no more to me," he thought. "I shall give away my goats and leave my cottage empty, and go as a man-at-arms to the wars."

He did as he had determined, and went to the village and offered his services to the lord who lived in the castle and often warred on his neighbour lords. And the thrush perched in the wild cherry-tree and watched the deserted cottage as it fell to ruin, stick by stick and stone by stone, for six more years, in silence, with no song.

Diccon had no weapons, so his services were refused. "I have not arms to spare for every chance, untried, would-be warrior who comes my way," scoffed the count. "Go, find a sword and then come back to me." So Diccon bound himself to a smith, to serve him without wages, until he should have earned enough to pay for a sword and its forging.

And when six years had passed the smith said, "You have worked well for me, and I would not willingly lose you, but I gave you my word and I must keep it." And he fashioned Diccon a sword, very bright and sharp, and gave it into his hands. And the sword was Elfrida; and under Diccon's fingers the cold, shining blade was as her cool white hand: but Diccon never knew her.

Diccon fought in the count's little army against the count's enemies, who were not his, and endured much hardship. But it seemed no hardship to him, whose heart ever ached for the

fairy woman he had lost. For seven years the sword served him well, and at the end of the seventh year it was shattered in battle by a mighty stroke, and was no more.

But Diccon had proved himself in the eyes of his lord, so the count gave him a spear with an ashen shaft. And a few days later, lying hidden beneath a wild rose-bush, beside a pathway, Diccon found a shield made of bronze and hide. He kept it for himself and polished it, and saw that all around the brazen rim it was chased with a design of plaited strands, like the braiding of long, long hair. And Diccon sighed, remembering. But though the shield was Elfrida, he knew her not. For seven years it guarded him well, and he held it before his heart whenever danger threatened, even as Elfrida had stood between him and the fairy people one midsummer night in his cottage.

In the count's little army Diccon found himself a comrade-in-arms, tall, dark-haired Falk, with the merry eyes and the jesting tongue. They became good friends and shared most things, and they fought side by side. Until at last there came a day when Falk was sorely wounded by a sword thrust, and knew that he must die.

Diccon sat upon the grass, with Falk's head across his knees, and tried to speak cheeringly of the things that they would do together when Falk's wound was healed, and Falk joined in the pretence as well as he could for his pain. But in the end he said, "Yet if none of these things should come

to pass, and if, after all, I should die of this wound there is a thing I would ask you to do for me."

"Tell me what it is," said Diccon, "and I will do it for you."

"I have a young sister, Grizel. She is my only kin, and it shames me now how little I have cared for her, and how seldom I have thought of her, and now it is too late and I can never make her amends. I left her to work for the old farmer, back in the village I came from. She was eight years old when I left her, and that is ten years ago. When I am dead, Diccon, will you go for my sake and see if she is happy, and if she is not, do all you may for her?"

"I shall do all that is needful, I promise you. But come, Falk, think no more of dying, for this is sorry talk."

When Falk was dead Diccon went to the count and gave him back his spear, asking to be released from his service. And the shield that was Elfrida he left behind him also, for he needed it no longer. But he did not leave it with the count, for it was not his; instead Diccon hid it under a bush, even as he had found it. "For who knows," he thought, "but that some other poor man may come this way, having need of a shield, and be glad to find it, as I was. It has served me well for nearly seven years."

Then he went to seek Falk's sister, as he had promised, and found her in misery—ill-treated and wretched. When he told her of her brother's death she wept and said, "I always

hoped that one day he might come back to me and take me away from here, but now all my hope has died with him."

Diccon could not bear the sight of her unhappiness, and he said, "He was a good friend to me, and I will be your brother in his place. It is as he would have wished." And she dried her eyes, and they left the farm together and set off for the city.

Now, the seven years were up since Elfrida had become a shield, and she became a large purse filled with gold. Diccon found it by the roadway, and he and Grizel rejoiced. "With but a little of this gold," said Diccon, "we can buy things and sell them again, and thus we shall make a profit." He looked at the gold that was as the gold of Elfrida's hair, as it glinted in the sunlight: but he knew her not.

It was even as he had said, and he prospered; and in two years' time he had enough money to buy a little house in the city, with an apple-tree in the courtyard. And because she was fair enough, and because she loved him, and because a man must have a mistress for his home, he married Grizel. She made him a good wife, and two children were born to them, a boy and a girl. And Diccon would have been happy could he have forgotten Elfrida.

Seven years after he had found it the purse of gold was empty—but Diccon had in its place five coffers filled with gold and silver coins, and Grizel had a silk dress and three of bright-dyed wool, and a serving-man and a maid. "We

should have a watchdog to guard our house and our goods, husband," she said.

"That is well thought of," he replied.

So Diccon bought a white hound-puppy to sleep in a kennel in the courtyard and be trained as a watchdog to guard his home. And Elfrida was the white hound-puppy and looked at him with adoring eyes. He fondled it and spoke kindly to it: but he never knew her.

One night, seven years after, as he walked home late from the house of a friend where he had been supping, the white hound at his side, he was set upon by an armed robber, and would surely have been killed had not the hound that was Elfrida leapt at the man's throat, so that he was forced to flee for his life. Diccon was left unharmed and unrobbed, but the white hound had been stabbed through the heart by the dagger of the thief.

Diccon wept. "I would not have lost my good dog for the half of my wealth," he said. And he buried the white hound beneath the apple-tree in his courtyard.

Three days later a youth came to the house, wearing a grass-green tunic. He said that his name was Simon and that he sought work. "We have no need of more servants," said the careful Grizel, and would have sent him away.

But to Diccon there was something appealing and almost familiar about the boy's sweet smile, and he said, "Let him stay. There will always be work that he can do."

So the youth Simon, who was Elfrida, became a servant in Diccon's house; and Diccon trusted him and cared for him as though he had been his own kin: but he never recognized Elfrida.

Diccon's two children grew up. The daughter married a merchant and left the house; but the son brought his bride home to live with him, and in time a little girl was born to them, and there was great rejoicing. But on the day of the babe's christening Simon came to Diccon and said, "Master, I have served you for seven years; it is time for me to go elsewhere."

Diccon sighed. "I have loved you, Simon, as though you were my own son, but it is for you to decide your future. My blessing goes with you, and my home is yours if ever you wish to return." He gave Simon a bag of money and a warm cloak and stood at the door to watch him depart, thinking, "I would have been well pleased to have gone with him, though I know not why."

A week went by and a pedlar came to the house with a pack full of trinkets—silver belt-buckles, woven girdles, knives with carved handles of wood, and a little golden ring. And Elfrida was the golden ring in the pedlar's pack. The pedlar spread out his wares for the household to admire, and Diccon bought a gift for every one—his family and his servants.

His son laughed. "But you have bought nothing for your-

self, father. What gift will you give to yourself?"

"I am a little old for gifts from a pedlar's pack," smiled Diccon. But he picked up the golden ring and saw that it was engraved with a wreath of wild roses, beautifully wrought, and he remembered the chaplet of wild roses which Elfrida had worn all those long years ago. "This shall be my gift," he said quietly, and slipped on to his finger the ring which was Elfrida: yet he knew her not.

And the years passed and Grizel died; and two more grandchildren were born in Diccon's house; and if ever an old man could have been contented, Diccon would have been, but that he had not forgotten Elfrida. "If I might see her just once again, as she was," he thought, "I could die happy."

For seven years he wore the ring engraved with wild roses; and then one morning when he awoke it was gone.

"You have lost your ring, grandfather," said his eldest granddaughter. "It was such a pretty one." And she wept.

He patted her head. "Do not cry, my child. What need has an old man of rings? Such toys and adornments are for fair young maids like yourself."

And seven times seven years had passed since Diccon had lost Elfrida, and he was sick and lying in his bed, with the wife of his son to tend him. "You will soon be better, father," she said to cheer him.

But Diccon remembered how he and Falk had pretended

in that very same way, and he smiled and shook his head. "I am old, my dear," he said. "I am old and I am very tired."

A white cat, which no one in the house had ever seen before, slipped into the room and leapt upon the bed. The wife of Diccon's son would have chased it away, but Diccon said, "Let it stay. It is a pretty creature and will be company for me."

So the cat curled itself on the blue woollen coverlet and purred. And Diccon looked into the cat's green-yellow eyes that were the colour of the eyes of his lost Elfrida; and because this world was slipping from his grasp and was now no more real to him than that other, fairy, world, which he had entered briefly for one midsummer night so many years before, he knew her at last. He smiled and whispered, "Elfrida, have you come back to me?"

And immediately the white cat became Elfrida, standing beside the bed in a gown of green silk and a silver-embroidered girdle with fringed ends; and all loose about her hung her long, long hair.

The wife of Diccon's son was afraid, and would have gone for help to drive the strange woman from the house, for she thought her to be a witch. But Diccon reassured her and said, "Give me your word that you will not try to part us, for she is some one very dear to me." And because she was fond of her husband's father she gave him her word—fearful though she was.

"I have waited long for you to come, my dearest," said Diccon.

Elfrida smiled. "And I have waited long for you to know me. I was the thrush that sang in the wild cherry-tree; I was the sword the smith forged for you; I was the shield which guarded you well; I was the purse of gold that bought you prosperity; I was the hound which died for you; I was Simon whom you loved as a son; and I was the ring engraved with wild roses."

And at last Diccon understood. "So in all these years," he said wonderingly, "I have never been alone."

Elfrida bent her head and kissed Diccon, while her pale golden hair fell all about him; and the moment for which he had waited for seven times seven years was come, and in happiness and peace he died.

And because in the instant of regaining her own shape Elfrida had become a mortal woman, even as the fairy people had said she would, her heart broke, and she fell lifeless by the bed.

Since she had made a promise, the wife of Diccon's son saw to it that they were not parted. She lied to the parish priest and gave him money for his church, and Diccon and his Elfrida were laid side by side in the churchyard, at peace and together for ever; and moon-daisies and red sorrel grew high among the grass on their grave.

MAGICAL HERBS AND FLOWERS

It was thought that herbs and flowers gathered on Midsummer Day possessed magical powers. They could heal, make one invisible, and protect against witches. Herbs were woven into fragrant garlands. Wherever these wreaths were hung—in the house, barns, or fields—they were thought to bring health to people and animals.

In Elizabethan England people believed that fern seed gathered and eaten on Midsummer Eve had the power to make one invisible. Others believed that fern seed put in the shoe made the owner invisible and guided him to hidden treasure. But the fern seed could not fall to the ground or touch the hand. It had to be gathered in a white handkerchief as it fell, and shaken into the shoe from the handkerchief.

Some say that fern seed blooms like gold or fire on Midsummer Eve. If you find a golden blossom throw it up in the air and where it falls you will find treasure.

According to an Estonian legend, a boy and girl found the golden flower one Midsummer Eve, but no one has ever found it since.

The springwort that grows in Germany in the Harz Mountains is said to bloom only between the hours of eleven and twelve on Midsummer Eve. When the clock strikes midnight the golden flower disappears. The flower is never still but hops about and glows like a firefly. If you catch it, put it in your right-hand pocket and you'll never be wounded by knife or bullet.

HEART-SHAPED COOKIES

Heart-shaped cakes and cookies, much like our Valentines, are popular at Midsummer.

4 cups sifted cake flour
2½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
⅔ cup shortening (Crisco)
1½ cups sugar
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
4 teaspoons milk

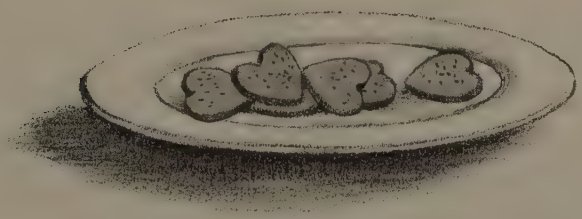
Glaze:
¾ cup confectioners' sugar
3 teaspoons water
granulated sugar or colored sprinkles

Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Mix shortening, sugar, eggs, and vanilla until creamy. Add flour mixture alternately with milk. Chill dough thoroughly (at least 1 hour). Dough may be left in the refrigerator overnight.

Preheat oven to 400° F. Roll out half of dough on lightly floured surface, keeping the rest of the dough in the refrigerator. Roll to 1/8 inch thickness. Cut into heart shapes, using a cooky cutter or your own pattern. Bake on cooky sheet for 9 minutes, or until golden brown.

To make glaze:

Mix sugar and water until smooth. Brush top of cookies with glaze. Sprinkle with granulated sugar or colored sprinkles.



Maid Lena

(from Denmark)

Once upon a time there was a farmer who had three sons. The eldest was called Peter, the second Paul, and the third Esben. Now Peter and Paul were a couple of strong, wide-awake lads. They could plow, and sow, and reap, so they were useful to their father. But the youngest was a poor sort of do-nothing fellow, who never had a word to say, but went mooning about like one in a dream, or sat over the fire and raked up the ashes, so they called him Esben Ash-Rake.

The farm stood amid fertile fields and fair green meadows, but in the middle lay a tract of barren, worthless moorland, strewn over with stones and overgrown with

heather. Here Esben loved to lie asleep and dreaming, or gazing up at the sky.

Peter and Paul, however, could not bear to see that bit of wasteland, so their father gave them permission to see what they could do with it. True, there was an old story about the land belonging to the fairies, but, of course, that was all nonsense. So Peter and Paul set to work with a will. They dug up all the stones, and put them in a heap on one side, and they plowed and sowed their new field. They sowed it with wheat, and in the spring it gave promise of a splendid crop.

Not one of their other fields looked half so well, until Midsummer Eve, when there came a sudden end to all their satisfaction—for on Midsummer Eve the whole crop was utterly destroyed. The entire field looked as if it had been trodden underfoot. Every blade of wheat was so crushed and beaten down that it could never recover or lift itself up again.

No one could understand how such a thing had happened. So there remained nothing to do but plow the field afresh, and let the grass grow.

Next spring there was finer and better grass there than in any of their meadows, but the same thing happened again. On Midsummer Eve all the grass was trodden down and beaten out as if with a flail, so they got no profit out of the field that year. Then they plowed it once more, let it lie

fallow through the winter, and in the spring sowed their field with flax. It came up beautifully, and before Midsummer Eve it was in full flower. It was a pretty sight, and Peter and Paul surveyed it with pride and joy. But, remembering what had taken place the two former years, they agreed that one of them should keep watch there on Midsummer Eve. Peter, as the eldest, said it was his duty, and arming himself with a stout cudgel, he sat down on the great bank of stones he had helped to pile up when they cleared the land.

It was a beautifully mild evening, clear and still. Peter meant to keep wide awake, but as time passed and nothing happened, he grew drowsy and soon fell fast asleep. At midnight he was awakened by a fearful rushing and roaring overhead that made the ground beneath him shake and tremble. The sky grew dark, and out of the darkness there shone something red that looked like a fiery dragon. The whole field seemed to roll from side to side till Peter began to feel as if he were being tossed in a blanket. There was such a roaring and buzzing in his ears that he became completely dazed.

Next day the flax lay there, trodden down and beaten out, till the whole field looked as smooth and bare as a deal board. After that neither Peter nor Paul cared to work the land, and the next spring the whole place was overgrown with grass and wildflowers. There were white lady's-smocks, blue cornflowers, and scarlet poppies. The heather, too,

came creeping and peeping up everywhere among the stones and flowers.

And now nobody troubled himself any further about the field except Esben, who liked it far better this year than he had done the three previous summers, and he used to go there oftener than ever and lie staring up at the blue sky.

On Midsummer Eve Esben slipped out of the house (after having slept most of the day) for he meant to keep watch all that night. He wanted to know what it was that went on there every Midsummer Eve, and whether it was the work of fairy-folk or other folk.

Close to the heap of stones there stood a tall tree, an old ash that had stood there many hundred years. Esben climbed up into this tree, sat very still, and kept awake till midnight. Then he too heard a roaring and a rushing that seemed to fill the air, and he too saw the sky grow as dark as if a carpet were spread out over it, and out of the darkness he saw a red gleam come. It came nearer and nearer till it took the form of a fiery dragon, with three heads and three long necks. As the dragon drew nearer, the storm increased, and a whirlwind rushed round and round the field, until each single blade and stalk lay there crushed and ground down, as if it had been trampled underfoot. The old ash tree lashed about him with its branches, while its aged trunk swayed to and fro so violently that Esben had to hold on tight, lest the whirlwind blow him away.

Then all at once it grew quite still and quiet, the sky was light again, and instead of a dragon with three heads, Esben now saw what looked like three large swans. But as they came nearer he saw they were three young girls, partly disguised in the form and plumage of swans, with great white wings and long flowing veils. They sank slowly down through the air to the foot of the old ash where Esben was. Then they cast aside their feathery disguise; the wings folded themselves together, and there, at the foot of the

tree, lay three white veils as fine as cobwebs. The three maidens rose and danced, hand in hand, round and round the field, singing all the while.

Never had Esben heard anything so enchanting, never had he seen anything so beautiful, as these young girls in their white robes and with golden crowns upon their heads. For a long time he was afraid to move, for he did not want to frighten them away. At length he slipped softly down, picked up the three white veils, and climbed as noiselessly up again.

The three swan-princesses had not noticed anything, but went on dancing round and round the meadow until three hours after midnight. Then they came back to the tree, and wanted to put on their veils again. But there were no veils to be found. They ran about, looking and looking, till at last they saw Esben up in the tree. They spoke to him, and said they were sure he had taken their veils.

"Yes," Esben told them. "I have them."

Then they entreated him to let them have them again, or they should be utterly ruined, they said. And they wept and implored, and promised to give him so much money for the veils that he would be richer than any king in the land.

Esben sat and gazed at them. How beautiful they were! So he told them they should not have their veils unless one of them would consent to be his wife.

"Ah, no," said one.

"Certainly not!" cried the second.

But the third and youngest princess said, "Yès, only bring us our veils."

Esben gave the other two their veils, but refused to let the third have hers until she gave him her hand and a kiss, and put a ring on his finger, and promised to come and be married to him next Midsummer Eve.

"We are three sisters," the princess told Esben, "and we were brought up in a castle that used to stand on this very spot. But a long, long time ago we were carried off by a wicked fairy, who keeps us imprisoned many thousands of miles from here, and only on Midsummer Eve are we allowed to revisit our old home. Now you must build a castle on this very spot, where our marriage can take place, and everything must be arranged on a princely scale. You may invite as many guests as you please, only not the king of the land. You shall not lack money. Break off a twig from the ash tree you climbed, strike the largest of the stones lying at its root, and say, "For Maid Lena!" The stone will roll back, and under it you will find all you may require. And so farewell till then," and she wound her veil about her head, as her sisters had already done. The veils spread out like white wings, and all three princesses flew away.

For a long time Esben stood gazing after them, quite stunned with all he had seen and heard. At last he roused

himself, broke a twig from the ash tree, and struck the stone, saying, "For Maid Lena!"

Immediately the stone rolled back, and beneath it was the entrance to a royal treasure house, full of silver and gold, and precious stones and costly jewels.

Esben took as many gold and silver coins as he could carry, struck the stone again, repeating the words, "For Maid Lena!" and then went back to the farm. His father and brothers hardly knew him, he was that changed. He walked with head erect, his eyes were shining, and he was full of life and energy.

Then Esben told them he knew who it was that had destroyed their harvest the three previous summers. That piece of land was not to be cultivated. He intended building a castle there, and there his wedding was to take place next Midsummer Eve.

At first they thought he had lost his wits, but when they saw all the silver and gold he had brought back with him, they changed their opinions, and let him give what orders he pleased.

And now began a busy time, the like of which was never seen, with axe and saw, and hammer and plane, and line and trowel, so that on Midsummer Eve the castle stood complete, with tower and turret, and roof and pinnacle all glittering with gold.

Now it so happened that just before Midsummer Eve, after all the invitations were out, Esben's father met the king, who was travelling through the country, and had contrived that his route should take him past the castle of which he had heard so much. Of course the farmer took off his hat to the king, who lifted his in return, and said he had heard of the grand wedding that was being prepared for the farmer's youngest son. The king added, "I should like to see him and his young bride."

Well, the farmer did not see that he could do otherwise than say that they would feel it a very great honor if the king would come to the wedding. So the king thanked him, and said it would give him great pleasure, and then he rode on.

On Midsummer Eve Esben was there, but as yet no bride had appeared. People began to whisper that things were not quite right, that Esben's bride had come to him in a dream, and had vanished with the dream.

Esben went and stood in front of the castle, and gazed up into the air.

"Oho!" said the folks. "She is to come that road, is she?" "Then she is neither more nor less than one of the foolish fancies Esben's head is always full of."

But Esben remained quite undisturbed. He had seen the swans flying through the air, and now he knew that his bride was near at hand.

Directly afterwards there came rolling up to the castle gates a magnificent golden coach, drawn by six white horses.

Esben sprang to open the carriage door, and there sat the bride, radiantly beautiful. But the first thing she said was, "Is the king come?" and Esben was obliged to say, "Yes, but he invited himself; we did not ask him."

"That makes no difference," she said. "If I were to become a bride here today, the king would have to be the bridegroom, and it would cost you your life, which would make me most unhappy, for I wish to marry you, and no one else. And now you will have to come to me, if you can, and that before the year is out, or it will be too late. I live many thousands of miles from here, in a castle south of the sun, west of the moon, and in the center of the earth." Then she drove off at a tremendous pace, and directly afterwards Esben saw a flock of swans rise up in the air and disappear among the clouds.

So Esben left everything, and set off on his wanderings through the wide, wide world to seek and find his bride. He made straight for the south, and he wandered for days and for weeks, and wherever he went he asked people if they knew the castle, but there was no one who had ever heard of it.

One day, out in a wood, he came upon two dwarfs fighting for an old hat that was lying close by.

"The hat is not worth much," said Esben.

But the dwarfs said this hat was not like other hats, for whoever put it on became invisible, and so they both wanted to have it.

And then they fell to again, and fought and struggled.

"Well, fight away till you are friends again," said Esben, as he snatched up the hat, put it on his head, and went his way.

When he had gone some little distance he came upon two other dwarfs fighting over a pair of boots. They told Esben that whoever put them on went a hundred miles with each step, so they both wanted them.

Esben advised them to run a race for the boots.

"I will throw a stone," said he, "and you must run after it, and whoever gets there first shall have the boots."

This they agreed to, so Esben threw the stone, and they set off running.

Meanwhile Esben put on the boots, and the first step carried him a hundred miles away.

There he came upon two dwarfs quarreling over a rusty old clasp-knife. The dwarfs told Esben that if you opened the knife and just pointed at any one with it, they fell down dead. Then if you shut it up again and touched them with it, they became alive again directly.

"Let me look at the knife," said Esben. "I shall be able to advise you, for I have settled such quarrels before."

When he got the knife, he opened it and pointed it at

the two dwarfs, who immediately fell dead.

"That's right," said Esben, so he shut up the knife and touched them with it, and they jumped up again directly.

Esben put the knife in his pocket, said good-bye, put the hat on his head, and in another second was a hundred miles away.

He went on and on till evening, when he came to a little house that stood in the middle of a thick wood. A very old woman lived there; she was so old that she was all overgrown with moss.

Esben greeted her politely, and asked if she could tell him where the castle was that stood south of the sun, west of the moon, and in the center of the earth.

"No," she said, "I have never heard of such a castle. But I rule over all the beasts of the field, and I will call them together, and ask if any one of them knows." So she blew a whistle, and wild beasts came gathering around them from all sides. But none of the animals knew anything about the castle.

"Well, then, you must go to my sister," said the old woman. "She rules over all the birds of the air. If she cannot help you, no one can. She lives three hundred miles south of here, on the top of a high mountain. You cannot miss your way."

So Esben set off again, and soon came to the bird mountain.

The old woman who lived there had never heard of the castle south of the sun, west of the moon, and in the center of the earth, but she whistled with her pipe, and all the birds came flocking from all four corners of the earth. She asked them if they knew the castle, but there was not one of them who had ever been so far.

"Ah! but the old eagle is not here," she said, and whistled again.

At last the old eagle came sailing heavily along, his wings whirring and whizzing, and he alighted on the top of a tree.

"Where do you come from?" said the old woman. "You come too late. Your life must pay the forfeit."

"I come from the castle south of the sun, west of the moon, and in the center of the earth," said the eagle. "I have a nest and young ones there, and I had to look after them a little before I could leave them and fly so far away."

The old woman answered that his life would be spared if he would conduct Esben to the castle. The eagle thought he could manage that, if he were allowed to stop and rest the night.

Next morning Esben got up on the eagle's back, and the eagle flew away with him—high, high up in the air, and far away over the stormy ocean.

When they had gone a long, long way, the eagle asked, "Do you see anything out yonder?"

"I see something like a high, dark wall close upon us!"

"Ah! that is the earth. We have to go through that. Hold fast, for if you were to get killed, I, too, would lose my life."

So they flew straight into the pitch-dark cave. Esben held fast, and almost directly afterwards he saw daylight again.

When they had gone a little farther, the eagle asked again, "Do you see anything out yonder?"

"I see something like a great glass mountain," said Esben.

"That is water," said the eagle. "We have to go through that. Hold fast, for if you were to get killed, I, too, would lose my life."

So they plunged right into the water, and got safely through. Then they flew some distance through the air, and the eagle asked again, "Do you see anything out yonder?"

"I see flames of fire," said Esben.

"We have to go through that," said the eagle. "Creep well under my feathers, and hold fast, for if you should get killed, I would lose my life."

So they flew straight into the fire, but they got safely through. Then the eagle sank slowly down, and alighted on the land.

"Now," said he, "I must rest awhile, but we have five hundred miles farther to go."

"Ah! Now I can carry you," Esben said. So he took the eagle on his back, and with five strides they were there.

So they arrived safe and sound at the castle south of the

sun, west of the moon, and in the center of the earth. That *was* a castle, the like of which was not to be found in all the world. It shone from top to bottom like pure gold.

Esben sat down outside the castle gate, and presently a serving-maid passed him on her way into the castle. He called to her, "Greet Maid Lena, and beg her for a goblet of wine for a weary wayfarer."

The girl brought the message to the princess, who ordered her own golden goblet to be filled with wine, and sent the girl out with it.

When Esben had drunk the wine, he threw his ring into the goblet—the ring she had given him the day they first met. The princess recognized the ring immediately. She ran down and embraced Esben and led him into the castle.

"Now I have got you, I must let you go again directly," she said, "and you must journey all the long way back in my swan garb, for if the witch who has enchanted us should catch sight of you, she would change you into stone with a single glance."

"There is a remedy for that," said Esben. "Only take me to her."

So Esben put on his invisible hat, took his knife in his hand, went up to the old witch, and just pointed at her, and she fell down dead.

Then Esben married his princess, and he is married to her still.

The dumb, or silent, supper dates back to seventeenth-century England.

The dumb supper was prepared late Midsummer Eve, entirely in the dark, without saying a word. Everything was done backward—the table was set backward, the chairs placed back to the table, and the food served walking backward from the kitchen. When everything was ready the girls who had prepared the supper would sit, backs to the table, and wait. At the stroke of midnight their future husbands would appear before them.

"I and my two sisters tried the dumb cake together. You must know two must make it, two bake it, and the third put it under each of their pillows (but you must not speak a word all the time), and then you will dream of the man you are to have. This we did, and, to be sure, I did nothing all night but dream of Mr. Blossom."

—Account from an eighteenth-century newspaper

MIDSUMMER CAKE

4 eggs
1 cup butter or margarine
2 cups sugar
3 cups sifted cake flour
3 teaspoons baking powder
1 cup milk
1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
1 package frozen strawberries, defrosted
1 package vanilla pudding, cooked according to directions on package
1½ cups heavy cream, whipped
sliced gumdrops, if desired
fine, dry bread crumbs

Beat eggs until thick and lemon-colored.

Cream butter or margarine. Gradually add sugar and continue to cream until fluffy, then add beaten eggs a little at a time.

Sift flour with baking powder 3 times. Add dry ingredients alternately with milk and vanilla, folding carefully until well blended.

Butter 2 9-inch round cake pans and sprinkle inside with fine, dry bread crumbs until evenly coated. Pour batter into pans. Bake in moderate oven (350° F) 30 to 40 minutes, or until done. Remove from pans and cool.

Cut each cake layer in half, so that you have 4 layers. Spread strawberries and vanilla pudding between layers of cake, and cover with half of the whipped cream. Spread

remaining whipped cream over cake. Decorate top of cake with sliced gumdrops, if you wish. Bread crumbs may be sprinkled over all.

Keep cake in refrigerator until ready to serve.

Serves 10 to 12.

Count Alaric's Lady

(from England)

Early in the morning of one midsummer's day, young Count Alaric rode out of his castle alone. His gay doublet was crimson and golden and there was gold thread on his gloves; and the trappings of his favourite white horse were silver and blue. The count sang as he rode over his fields, for he was happy and the sun was shining and life was good.

Half-way across a meadow he saw a maiden sitting on the grass. Her gown was of green with a silver girdle and she had flaxen hair so pale that it was almost white. Her chin was little and pointed and her eyes were a golden-green.

Her feet were bare, and on her head she wore a wreath of moon daisies.

He reined in his horse and bade her good day, and she looked up at him. 'Good day,' she said, and her voice was low and very sweet.

'You are a stranger here, fair lady,' said Count Alaric, dismounting. 'Will you not tell me your name?'

She smiled a little, but distantly, as though she were smiling at something she remembered rather than at the young man who stood before her. 'I do not know my name,' she replied.

'But where do you come from?' asked the count, surprised.

'I do not know.'

'Where are you going to, can you remember that?'

She shook her head, but did not seem distressed.

'Can you tell me nothing about yourself?' he asked.

'Nothing,' she said, 'save that for an hour or two I have been sitting here in this field, watching the sun rise higher in the sky and listening to the song of the lark.'

Count Alaric was too courteous not to believe her story, though it seemed to him curious that she should know nothing about herself. 'Is there any way I can help you?' he asked.

But all she said was, 'You are very kind.'

He looked down at her, at her pale, strange beauty; and

she looked up and smiled, this time more deeply, and at him; and he knew that he wanted to help her more than anything in the world. But there was a look in her golden-green eyes that he had never seen in the eyes of anyone before; a look as though, even while she smiled and spoke to him, she were thinking of something else.

'My castle is yonder, behind those trees,' he said. 'Will you come to my castle with me?'

And after she had thought a while, she said, 'I will go with you.'

She rose, and he lifted her on to his horse and set her before him and rode back over the meadow and past the trees to his castle, where it stood with its lichen-covered walls all warm and golden in the morning sun.

And as she had no name he called her Catherine, because it had been his mother's name and he knew of none more beautiful. And since he loved her dearly and she was willing, he married her, and they were happy together. Though she was usually silent when others were near, she laughed and talked with him; but whenever he looked into her golden-green eyes he saw that she was thinking of something else.

She knew neither how to spin nor weave, and she could not bake a loaf; but since she was Count Alaric's lady, with servants to wait on her, it mattered not. She could not play upon the lute or the harp, and had no skill in embroidery; but since, when she was alone, she was content to sit in the

sun, hour after hour, with her hands folded on her lap and a little half-smile on her lips, it mattered not. She never talked to her women or made friends with them or gossiped pleasantly to while away the time, as even great ladies will, but kept herself reserved and distant; and they thought her strange and whispered so, but she cared nothing for what they said, so it mattered not.

When there were festivities at the castle, and everyone danced, Count Alaric's lady would never join in the merry-making; but sat instead by the wall and watched and smiled. And because it was her wish, though he longed to dance with her, Count Alaric did not try to persuade her otherwise. But one day he came upon her in a room of the castle, where a shaft of sunlight streamed through a window, dancing a strange measure alone, watched only by the stiff faded figures of the arras on the wall.

'You dance so lightly and so gracefully,' he said, 'why will you never dance with me?'

She looked at him with a puzzled frown. 'I never want to dance,' she said.

He laughed. 'You were dancing a moment ago, dearest, I saw you as I came in.'

Her face lightened. 'Ah yes, I heard the music and I had to dance.'

'But, dearest, there was no music.'

'There was,' she said with conviction, 'I heard it plainly

and I had to dance. Sometimes I hear it in the distance, but to-day it seemed quite near.'

'Can you hear it now?' he asked.

She listened for a moment before shaking her head sadly. 'No, it is all silent now.'

Count Alaric took her hands in his. 'Tell me, Catherine,' he said, 'tell me the truth, are you happy with me?'

She smiled and laughed and kissed him. 'Of course I am happy with you,' she said.

But his heart was heavy, even as he took her in his arms, for he saw still the look in her eyes, as though she thought of something else.

And when a year had passed, all but two days, since he had met his lady first, sitting alone in the meadow with moon daisies in her hair, the day before midsummer's eve, Count Alaric had to go on a journey.

'I shall be back within three days,' he said to her as he mounted his horse, and she smiled and wished him God-speed as he rode off with six retainers along the path that led from the castle, turning more than once to look back at her where she stood in the archway of the great door, her pale hair bright in the sunshine.

By the following evening, the count found that the matters to which he had travelled to attend were settled to his satisfaction; and because the next morning would be a year to the very day when he had first set eyes on his lady, and

because he could not bear to be parted from her for even a moment, he left his men to rest for the night while he rode home alone, hoping to reach his castle by morning, so that he would be with her at the very same hour as that upon which he had found her, twelve months before.

He rode all through the night, and towards dawn, when the moon was beginning to fade, as he passed the meadow where he had first seen the maiden he had married, he heard strains of sweet music. He rode towards it over the grass, his horse's hooves making no sound on the soft green carpet, scattered with clover and buttercups. As he came nearer to the music he could see in the moonlight some twenty or thirty figures dancing. Pale faces with flying hair above gowns of green and bare white feet in the dew, as they trod a strange measure, daintily.

'It is the fairy people dancing on midsummer's eve,' thought Count Alaric, and he rode a little closer to watch them. And then he became aware that one among them with hair so fair it might have been a moonbeam around her head, was wearing crimson with a golden girdle, instead of green. 'That hair,' he thought, 'and that little pointed chin. And I have seen her wearing that gown before.' But he could not believe it, and he watched for many minutes before he knew, beyond a doubt, that the dancer in crimson was the Lady Catherine.

'The fairy people have lured her from the castle to dance

with them,' he thought. 'I must save her from their power. There is no time to lose,' and he urged his horse forward toward the dancers, meaning to ride in among them and seize his lady and gallop home with her before he could be prevented. But at the nearness of the fairy people his horse suddenly took fright and bolted, fleeing like a mad creature back the way it had come. It had carried him three miles along the road before he finally calmed it and could turn its head for home again. But before he reached the place where the dancers had been, the cock crew for the dawn of a new day, and he found the meadow quite deserted.

He rode on past the trees to the castle and went straight to his lady's room, thinking to find it empty. But when he flung back the velvet curtains of her bed, by the light of the branched candlestick he held, he saw her there, asleep, her pale hair spread over the pillow. He had disturbed her, and she awoke and smiled.

'Dearest,' he said, 'is all well with you?'

'Of course it is well,' she replied. 'You are home sooner than I expected. I am glad.'

'What did you do while I was away?' he asked.

'I waited for you. What else should I do?'

'What did you do last night?'

'I slept. What else should I have done?' She smiled again. 'You ask so many questions. I am tired. Let me sleep. Wake

me again when the sun is high.' And she closed her eyes and slept once more.

'I must have been mistaken,' thought the count. 'It was not her I saw in the meadow.' And reassured, he turned from the bed and walked softly away. But hanging over a chair he caught sight of her gown of crimson brocade, and he saw that the hem of it was dark and heavy with damp, as though it had been dragged in the dew.

But Count Alaric spoke no more to his lady about the matter. 'For,' he said to himself, 'at the best she will have forgotten everything and my questions will only distress her, and at the worst she will remember and lie to me, and I could not bear a lie from her lips.'

But though he said nothing, Count Alaric thought much on what had passed on midsummer's eve, and every time that he looked into the eyes of his lady and saw that still she thought of something else, his heart grew heavier. And at last there came a day when he said to himself, 'I can bear this no longer, I must speak of it to someone who can give me advice.' And he remembered old Magda, the wise woman who lived on the heath, and how, while his mother had lived, Magda had sometimes come to the castle and been received with kindness and respect. He remembered how once, when he had been only a child, he had fallen ill, and his mother had sent for Magda, and she had come

and stood by his bed where he burnt in fever; and she had laid her hand on his head and it had grown cool under her touch, and she had smiled at him and given his mother some herbs she had gathered, with instructions how to prepare a healing drink of them; and from that moment he had grown better.

'I will go to Magda in her hovel on the moors,' he thought. 'If there is anyone who can tell me why there is that look in my Catherine's eyes, it is wise old Magda.'

So Count Alaric rode across the heath, over the purple heather, where the harebells nodded their dainty cups and the little blue butterflies flitted; and when he came to the tumbledown hut where Magda lived, he dismounted and knocked on the door, and a voice bade him come in.

The door was low and he had to stoop his head to pass inside. After the bright sunshine on the heath he could see nothing at first; but as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light within, he saw Magda sitting by the wall plaiting a basket from rushes; and he stood waiting by the door until she should look up and notice him. She finally put her work aside and smiled. 'Good day, Count Alaric. Sit you down.' He sat on a stool opposite her and waited for her to speak again.

Magda was only a peasant woman, tall and lean, with broad shoulders and strong hands; her gown of rough frieze had seen many seasons come and go, and her feet were bare.

Yet she had a dignity of bearing which many great ladies might have envied, and she treated Count Alaric as though he were her equal, while he treated her as though she were a queen; and that not because it was whispered that she could cast spells on those who displeased her, but for herself alone, because he thought of her as a queen among women.

She watched him with her shrewd, kindly eyes, and for a few moments she said nothing; and the count drew in peace and comfort from her gaze and thought how in all the years since he had seen her first she had not changed nor aged. She had still the same strong lines in her calm face that had been burnt by the summer suns, and the same grey eyes under the faded red cloth twisted round her head.

'You are in trouble, Alaric,' she said at last, 'or you would not have sought me out.'

'I need your help,' he said.

'You are lord of all the land for miles, your castle stands firm and mighty and your possessions are great. You have all a man could desire, and you have been married but fourteen months to a lady whose beauty, I hear, surpasses the beauty of all other women of these parts. And yet you need to ask my help.'

'It is of my Catherine that I would speak with you.'

'And what would you tell me about the Lady Catherine?' Magda folded her hands on her lap.

And Count Alaric told her of how he had found, sitting alone in a meadow, the strange maiden who could tell him nothing about herself; and of how his lady had none of the skill in homely crafts such as women usually possess; and of how he had seen her, on midsummer's eve, dancing with the fairy people in the fields. 'And always,' he said, 'always when I watch in her eyes, I see there a strange look, as though she is thinking of something else. Tell me what ails her, Magda, for I love her dearly.'

When he had done, Magda sat silent for a while in thought. Then she said, 'I think I know what ails the Lady Catherine, but I would be sure before I speak. Come to me again to-morrow, and bring me a lock of her hair.'

That night, while his lady lay sleeping, Count Alaric cut off a lock of her pale hair; and the next morning he rode again over the heath. When he knocked on the door of her hovel Magda was stirring a stew of herbs over the fire. 'Come in and sit you down,' she said.

The count drew the lock of hair from the pouch at his belt and gave it to her, and she took it without a word and rose and held it in her hands.

He watched her standing there, as tall as any man, in her grey frieze gown, holding the hair, like a faint imprisoned moonbeam, in her strong brown hands. She looked at it a long time, and then she went to the fire, and crouching

down, dropped it on the embers. The lock burnt with a sigh and a greenish flame, and left a little wisp of smoke which hovered for a moment by the hearth before dissolving in the air.

Magda rose and looked at the count. 'It is as I thought,' she said, 'your lady is one of the fairy people.'

Count Alaric cried out, 'She cannot be!' But he saw the pity and understanding in Magda's eyes and he knew that she spoke the truth.

'When you first found her she must have been dancing on midsummer's eve as the fairy people do, and for some reason remained in the meadow after dawn when her companions had returned to their other world. Away from her people she would forget much of her life with them, and that is why she could tell you nothing of how she came to be there. You have married one of the fairy people, Alaric.'

He turned away. 'Must I then lose her?' he asked.

'So long as she remembers anything of her fairy life she will never be wholly yours. She will always hear the fairy music borne to her on the wind, and on midsummer's eve she will always have to dance with her people; and one day she may not return from their revels. And even if she should come back to you each time, whenever you see into her eyes, there will always be that look as though she is thinking of something else.'

'Is there no way by which I can win her completely for my own?' asked the count in despair. 'No way I can make her forget the fairy people?'

'There is only one way,' replied Magda, 'by which a mortal can win one of the fairy people for himself, and that is by offering her a love so perfect that it leaves no room in her mind for memories of any other life. Only when your love for your lady is perfect will she forget entirely what she once was and whence she came, only then will she cease to hear the fairy music and wish to dance to it, and only then will you be able to look into her eyes and see that she is thinking of nothing but of you and of herself and of your life together.'

'But my love for her is perfect,' said the count. 'I love her with all my heart. I give her everything she desires, I would toil and fight for her if need be, my whole life is hers. Oh, Magda, I would die for her.'

Magda shook her head. 'There must be something lacking. If your love for her were perfect, she would be wholly yours.'

'Then what am I to do?' asked the count.

'My friend,' replied Magda gently, 'that is something I cannot know. Search your heart and ask it where you have failed, I cannot tell you what lies within yourself.'

'My love for her could not be greater than it is. If she is not now wholly mine, she never will be."

'Do not despair,' said Magda. 'Go home and see what time will do to help you.'

He mounted his horse and rode over the heather, and Magda came part of the way with him, striding beside the white horse, her head held proudly. Within sight of the castle she stopped. 'Farewell and good luck, Alaric,' she said. 'My thoughts will be with you,' and she left him to go on alone.

Count Alaric returned to his castle, and from that day on he was even kinder to his lady than he had been before, if that were possible. He sent over all the land for gifts to please her, and never a day went by without his offering her yet another proof of his affection, as if he hoped that thus his love might at last grow perfect. But though she was gay and happy enough, whenever he looked into her eyes he saw that still she thought of something else; and now that he knew what it was she was thinking of, he grew hourly more sad, though he hid his sorrow carefully.

And the days passed and joined together to make the months. The winter came and after winter the spring, and then spring was gone with its yellows and whites, and the summer was back again. And on midsummer's eve, as soon as it was dusk, Count Alaric's lady slipped out through the castle gates in a gown of blue velvet and ran to the fields; and the farther she went from the castle, the louder grew the fairy music in her ears. Count Alaric, who had been

waiting and watching, saw her go, and he buckled on his sword and mounted his horse and followed her.

When he reached the meadow he heard the music and saw once again the fairy people dancing on the grass in their fluttering gowns of green. And his lady was among them, her feet as bare as theirs, with her pale hair hanging about her shoulders like a veil thrown over the blue velvet that looked grey by the light of the moon.

The count left his horse by the hazel bushes at the edge of the field and came nearer to the dancers, treading softly and keeping to the shadows where he could. And as he

watched her whom he called Catherine dancing with her people and laughing aloud with the joy of it, he felt as though his heart would break. 'She must be mine,' he whispered. 'I will take her from them no matter what it costs.' And he drew his sword and stepped in among the dancers and seized her by the arm.

The fairy people scattered apart and fluttered into a group like a heap of leaves a little way off; white faces with piercing golden-green eyes watching him in the moonlight. His lady would have gone with them, but that he held her fast. 'Catherine, it is I, Alaric, your husband. I have come to fetch you home.' But she only struggled and turned her face to the fairy people and cried to him to let her go. And the fairy people held out their arms to her like white moonbeams and called, 'Come back to us, our sister.'

And when Count Alaric's lady found that she could not break free from his hold, she became cunning and ceased to struggle. She smiled at him in the moonlight. 'My people wait for me, dear husband. They wait for me to dance with them. Let me go and join in the dancing, and when it is over, I will come back to you.'

'If I let you go, you may never come back to me.'

She touched his cheek with her one free hand and stroked his hair. 'Dear husband, I promise to come back to you.'

He shook his head. 'The promises of the fairy people are as a drop of water lost in a stream or as a breath blown

with the wind. If I let you go, you may never come back.'

The fairy people fluttered their arms and their gowns of green and called, 'Come, our sister, come back to us.'

She ceased her smiling and knelt at his feet and lifted her face to his, and her golden-green eyes were aswim with tears. 'The fairy people have no tears,' she said, 'but you have taught me how to weep.'

He turned away from her so that pity should not make him weak. But still he held her wrist and said, 'If I let you go, I may never see you again.'

The fairy people swayed closer in the moonlight and moaned, 'O our sister, our sister, come back to us.'

And when she saw that neither by cajoling nor entreaties could he be moved, Count Alaric's lady leapt to her feet and cried out, 'Give me now your strength, my people.' And they broke from their group like leaves blown by a breeze, whispering, 'Be strong, our sister, be strong. Be strong and come back to us,' and encircled the count and his lady.

And Count Alaric's lady became a sapling with the wind in its branches, and instead of her wrist his hand gripped its trunk and the wind bent it away from him to tear it from his hold. But he flung aside his sword and clung to the tree, and at last the wind died down and all was still.

The ring of fairy people moved nearer. 'Be fierce, our sister, be fierce. Be fierce and come back to us.'

And Count Alaric's lady became a red vixen which

writhed in his hands and bit to the bone. But in spite of its struggles he held it, and at last it lay still in his arms.

The fairy circle drew closer. 'Be wild, our sister, be wild. Be wild and come back to us.'

And Count Alaric's lady became a silver salmon which twisted and turned and would have slipped from his grasp, but that he held it close till it lay gasping in his hands.

The fairy feet stepped nearer, coming over the grass. 'Be formless, our sister, be formless. Be formless and come back to us.'

And Count Alaric's lady became water which would have trickled through his fingers, but that he held it in his cupped hands, crouched low to the earth.

The fairy voices were closer, crying in the moonlit night. 'Be swift, our sister, be swift. Be swift and come back to us.'

And Count Alaric's lady became a breath of wind upon the air that sought to elude him and be lost for ever, but he clasped it in his hands and held it to his heart.

The white faces of the fairy people pressed nearer. 'Be burning, our sister, be burning. Be burning and come back to us.'

And Count Alaric's lady became a tongue of flame that burnt his hands as though it would scorch away the flesh. But the count thought, 'If I can hold her until the dawn, she will be partly mine for at least another year.' And he did not let go of the flame.

And Count Alaric's lady took once again her own shape and sank down upon the grass at his feet and hid her face with her one free hand while he kept hold of the other. 'You are too strong for me,' she whispered, 'and I cannot leave you.'

A wail rose up from the fairy people and the circle broke, and they scattered and joined again in a group a short way off. And the garments of the fairy people merged a little with the grass, and their hair was like a mist to hide them, and their voices came more faintly over the meadow.

The count looked up and saw a thin streak of saffron in the east. 'It is almost dawn,' he thought, 'and she will be with me for another year.' But he looked at her, where she crouched in the grass and moaned. 'Catherine,' he said gently, 'if you stay with me, will you remember your people and be sad?'

She turned her head and looked upwards to him. 'I shall only partly remember them. I shall regret them faintly, but not be sad. I shall always know that there is something which I have lost, but I shall not remember what.'

'And if you went back to your people, would you remember me and our life together and regret that it was past?'

'I should remember nothing of our life together. I should forget you utterly, so I should have no regrets and be only happy.'

'I would not wish you to have even a moment of sorrow.

Dearest, go back to your people and be happy, without any memories.' And Count Alaric let go of her wrist, and she rose and went to the fairy people where they held out their hands to her and fluttered their gowns of green; while in the distance the first cock crew for the dawning of a new day.

'It is dawn and they will take her away with them and I shall never see her again,' thought the count, and he turned and ran to the hedge where his horse was tied; and he never looked back, for it was dawn and he could not bear to see no one in the meadow where the fairy people had been dancing.

He rode his horse blindly, over fields and through woods, caring not where it carried him; and an hour later, when he turned for the first time from his bitter thoughts, it was to find that he was on the road for home. There before him was his castle, golden in the early sun; and between him and the castle, along the dusty road, trudged a solitary figure in a blue velvet gown. He urged on his horse and she heard it and turned and saw him and waited, joy and relief on her face. He reined in beside her. 'Catherine,' he said.

For all her joy and relief she was very near to tears. 'Oh Alaric, I can almost not walk another step, I am so tired. And see,' she raised her skirts a little, 'I have somehow lost my shoes. I woke up and found myself in a meadow, all alone, and I was so afraid. I must have walked there in my

sleep. Did you ride out to look for me? And were you afraid too?'

Count Alaric smiled. 'I rode out to look for you,' he said. 'And I was afraid.' He lifted her on to his horse before him, and when he looked into her golden-green eyes, he saw that she was no longer thinking of anything else, but only of him and of herself and of their life together, and that at last she was wholly his.

And in that moment Count Alaric knew that love is only perfect when it will give up even the thing which it loves, for that thing's sake.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellin Greene, a former storytelling specialist in the New York Public Library system, has been a children's literature specialist at the Graduate School of Library Service at Rutgers University and at the National College of Education. She is currently a doctoral student in the Creative Arts program at Rutgers.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Barbara Cooney is the distinguished illustrator of many fine books for children, including *Chanticleer and the Fox,* for which she was awarded the Caldecott Medal.

Ms. Cooney divides her time between a home in Pepperell, Massachusetts and one in Damariscotta, Maine.

ELLIN GREENE, a former storytelling specialist in the New York Public Library system, has been a children's literature specialist at the Graduate School of Library Service at Rutgers University and at the National College of Education. She is currently a doctoral student in the Creative Arts program at Rutgers.

Midsummer themes hold a special fascination for Ms. Greene, not only because of her deep interest in folklore but because of a memorable visit to a friend in the Swedish countryside, during which she participated in a joyous, traditional, Midsummer festival.

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